

What Does the Bible Say About Our Bodies?

Our current culture has a lot to say about our bodies. Added to that, certain trends within our culture, from the number of people getting tattoos, to the number of teenage girls being referred for gender dysphoria, say something about how people see their bodies.

But the Bible also has something to say. In fact, it has so much to say we can't cover it all in this talk. So, I'm not going to talk about tattoos! Instead, I want to give you ten biblical principles to shape your thinking when it comes to sex and gender and specifically our bodies.

But as I do that, I'm aware that those you interact with, - or maybe even yourself - may disagree with me. So for each principle I want to give you some questions to ponder, to help you as you engage with others or maybe as your process it for yourself.

Principle no.1: We're followers of Christ - God who became flesh

Now, if you're not yet a Christian, you might think all religions are the same. But they're not. Christianity makes a unique claim about God, *and* about the body. In his gospel, John writes, 'And the Word [God the Son] became flesh and dwelt among us.'

And no other religion says that God came into the world, at a specific point in history, as a man, in a body. You see, he could have just sent a prophet, or shouted at us from heaven. But Christianity says, he didn't.

Instead, in Jesus, God took upon himself a body, and was born as a baby. And, during his time on earth, Jesus cared about other people's bodies and healed them; and he suffered and died in his body, and was raised in his body, and at his ascension he did not jettison his body, but lives forever in heaven in that glorified body

And that gives Christianity a unique view of the human body. It tells us it matters.

And so, we're not gnostics or dualists. We don't believe we're spirits trapped in bodies, or that the body is bad and the spirit - some 'real' inner, 'authentic' you - is good. We're Christians. We worship Christ - God who took on human flesh, and that gives the human body incredible dignity and worth.

So, *question to ponder*:

In the way you see the world, what value do you place on your or others' physical bodies? How do you determine that value?

Principle no. 2: We have a Maker

In Psalm 139, the Psalmist says to God, 'For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.' (v13-14)

So you did not make yourself. God made you. In fact, it says, he knitted you together. Now, when I was young, my mother tried to teach me to knit. The problem was the only spare wool she had was white. And so after I don't know how many days, the scarf I was making extended to a massive 15cms, was grey and grubby and full of dropped stitches.

That is not how God has knitted you together or made you, the psalmist says. You're intricately, beautifully hand-made by God on purpose. Which means your body is the one he intended you to

have. And if he made you on purpose your body must have a purpose - a reason he made it. And just like anything that's been made on purpose, for a purpose, your body will thrive best when you use it according to that purpose - which we'll look at in a minute.

Now, what if you don't believe God made you? That you, and your body, are a thing of chance? Well, that means there is no point to you or your body. It's just chance, you're pointless. But do you really believe that? Because Christianity doesn't.

So *questions to ponder*:

What do you think can give a more healthy self-image, that there's no ultimate point to your body or that there is?

If there is no Maker, where do you find the point, not just of your body, but your life?

If we don't have a Maker, who has the final say over what someone can do to their body? Can anyone do to their body whatever they want - like starve it or self-harm it? If not, why not?

Principle no. 3: Our bodies are fearfully, wonderfully made

Psalm 139 again, 'I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.'

And *fearfully* means your body is awe-inspiring. And *wonderfully made* means you look at the human body and stand back in wonder.

And you know that's true. Just consider how the body's systems work, and work together. Or think how the optical and auditory pathways are working even now as you watch, and listen to me. Or think about the extraordinary things going on in the most basic of cells, which you and I could never hope to create. You could not make you!

And so the psalmist is right - our bodies are awe-inspiring!

So, *questions to ponder*.

What makes more sense, that the awe and wonder you feel as you look at the body are ultimately meaningless chemical reactions in your brain, or that awe and wonder and beauty are real and profoundly meaningful?

Given the awe-inspiring nature of the body, is it right to cut parts of it off when they're healthy? For example, should someone who wants to amputate a healthy limb be helped to do so? If not, should someone who wants their healthy penis or healthy breasts amputated be supported in doing so?

Principle no. 4: Our bodies are truly part of us

In Genesis 2 we're told how God created the first man: 'The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.'

So God does not make Adam as a soul and then look for a body to house him in. Adam, the man, is his body, and God brings him to life.

Then, in 1 Cor 6 Paul writes, 'Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know

that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body' (v18-20)

And notice how Paul uses 'you' and 'your body' interchangeably. Your body is not external to who you are. It is who you are. Not all of you, but part of you.

And your body can not be separated from who you are. You can't do something with your body and say it wasn't you doing it! And no one can do something to your body and claim they weren't doing it to you.

And you know this is true - when someone hurts someone physically they're hurting that person. If someone is unconscious, and someone else violates their body, they're violating that person.

And so, your body tells you who you are. I mean, imagine if I were to claim to be Dwayne Johnson, the Rock, how would you respond? 'No you're not!' Why? Because my body tells you, and me, 'that is not who you are, Martin.' But, our current culture says, a supposed 'real', 'authentic' you is buried beneath your body, but the Bible says, 'no, your body tells you something of who the real, authentic you is. And Martin may be bald, but he is also short, and white, and weedy. He is not the Rock.'

Questions to ponder:

Do our bodies have *anything* to say about who we are?

Which is healthier: to see our bodies as part of the real us, and allow them to tell us something of who we really are, or to surgically change our bodies to fit an underlying 'authentic' us, that may change again in a few years time?

Principle no. 5: Our bodies are sexed.

And the first time humans get a mention in the Bible, in Genesis 1, we're sexed, male and female, and it's binary. Verse 27, 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'

So you're not just a body, you're a male or female body. You are not just a person, you're a male or female person. And so male and femaleness are not *psychologically* determined, they're bodily determined. And while people can try and change their outward appearance, every cell in their body tells them - you're male or female.

And males become men - with the possibility of becoming husbands and fathers. And females become women - with the possibility of becoming wives and mothers. And there's a complementarity to each sex, with male and female bodies designed to come together to create new life.

Question to ponder:

The scientific facts tell us we are male or female and our bodies are complementary. Is it wise to live against the grain of what our bodies tell us?

Principle no. 6: We understand bodily shame and brokenness

Genesis 3 tells us how the first man and woman disobeyed God. One consequence was how they now saw their bodies: ‘Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin cloths... and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord’ (v7-8).

So, choosing to live life their own way, resulted in bodily shame and hiding - from God and each other.

And as sin entered the world, from that point on, the world was broken. And that’s not just had an impact on how we *see* our bodies, but *on* our bodies and what we do with them.

You see, when Jesus talks of marriage in Matthew 19, he also talks of those for whom marriage is likely not an option: ‘For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.’ (v12).

Three types of eunuch. And in the ancient world, a eunuch was a man who had been castrated, and served as a royal official - that’s the second type Jesus mentions: someone who has been made a eunuch by others. But what’s the first case he describes, *those born eunuchs*? Well, Jesus is probably referring to people born with disorders of sexual differentiation, intersex. But in the third case, *those who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom*, he probably means those who choose to stay single for the sake of God’s work - including those with same-sex attraction.

And the point is that, in our sin-broken world, our bodies and bodily desires can experience brokenness too.

But sin also results in us doing sinful, broken things *with* our bodies. As Paul writes in Romans 1:24, if people live against the grain of their sexed, male/female bodies it leads them to ‘the dishonouring of their bodies.’

So, as Christians, we understand why people feel ashamed of their bodies, or experience same-sex attraction, or gender dysphoria. We get the brokenness of our world. But we also know that at the cross Christ was broken for us, in *his* body, as he took all our sin and brokenness upon himself. So our hearts can be full of compassion and hope.

So, ***questions to ponder:***

The Bible can explain why bodily shame exists. How do you explain it?

Recent evidence suggests that pornography exposure may, in part, be behind the rise in gender dysphoria in teens. Christianity can say why pornography is both destructive and morally wrong, but can you?

Principle no. 7: Our bodies belong to the Lord

Look again at 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: ‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.’

So if you're a Christian, Christ has bought you out of sin and shame. So now, neither sin, nor shame, nor you yourself, are your master, Christ is. Our bodies do not belong to us, to do with as we like, but to Christ. And his Spirit dwells in our bodies. Which means what we do with our bodies matters.

Question to ponder - especially for Christians who may see things differently:
Is your body yours to do with as you like? Why or why not?

Principle no. 8. Our bodies tell us who we should be having sex with

In 1 Cor 6:18 Paul writes, 'Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.'

So, there are things that we are *not* to do with our bodies sexually. And because our bodies really are us, what we do with them sexually, we do with ourselves. So if we engage in sexual sin we're sinning against our selves - which can do something very deep to you.

Now Paul is writing this to people who were saying that having sex with whoever you want is just a natural response to natural desires. Well, that might be your desire, Paul says, but, v13, 'the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but the Lord.'

Ok, but what is sexual immorality? Well, in v9-10 Paul's told them: 'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality... will inherit the kingdom of God.' And the word for *sexually immoral* - πορνοι/πορνος - means any sexual activity outside of marriage. While *adultery* means any sexual activity *when* you're married but with anyone other than the person you're married to. And the words for *men who practice homosexuality* refers to both the active and passive partners in homosexual sex.

So... our bodies tell us - we've been designed for heterosexual sex and, as Paul writes in Romans 1, anything other than that is 'contrary to nature' (v26). But that heterosexual sex is only to happen only within the safe walls of lifelong, exclusive marriage.

Question to ponder:

Sexually transmitted diseases would disappear if people only ever had sex with their husband or wife. Should that tell us anything about the boundaries of sex?

Sociological research suggests that married mothers and fathers have more financial resources, and are happier than childless singles, and that their children do better than those who divorce. Does that tell us something about how we should pursue sexual relationships?

Principle no. 9: We are to give our bodies to God in worship

In the first 11 chapters of his letter to the Romans, Paul sets out how, despite all our sin - including sexual sin - God has been incredibly merciful to us in Christ. But then, in Romans 12, he writes, 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present *your bodies* as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (v1-2).

So the world has a view on what you should be doing with your body, and it'll try and get you to conform to it. Instead, Paul says, offer your body to God in worship. Not to earn his favour, but because, in Christ, you already have it.

And as we do, our minds - the way we think, and see the world, will be transformed, so that we can discern God's will, not least what he wants us to do with our bodies.

So... what is that will? Well, in 1 Cor 6:20 Paul tells us, 'You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.' In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 he writes, 'This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.' So God's will for our lives is that, as we grow more sanctified, more like Jesus, that by the things we hear, and watch, and think, and say, and do, as we lay down our lives in love and service of others, like Jesus did, we will bring glory to God through our bodies.

So, question to ponder:

How might other people be shaping the way you see, and what you do with, your body? Are you aware of that influence? And could Christianity be calling you to something more noble and loving?

Principle no. 10. There is hope for us and our bodies

So, the Bible is not naive about the stuff we do with our bodies or the brokenness of our bodies. And yet, having told us that the sexually immoral will not enter the kingdom of God, Paul says, 'And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God' (1 Cor 6:11).

And in 1 Cor 15, Paul explains that the resurrection of Jesus' body was just the beginning. The day will come when *our* bodies are *also* going to be raised. 'The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed' (v52).

So at the heart of Christianity is hope! In Christ there is abundant forgiveness and cleansing now, for what we've done with our bodies, and one day our broken and confused bodies will be made new, and everything will be made right.

Questions to ponder:

What gives you hope for people who are suffering in their bodies?

What help does your world view give to those who know they're guilty for having done wrong with their bodies?

Because Christianity gives both hope and help.