



HEALTH DAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Lection - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? (v. 20) For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Health Day is a day when many Christian communities take the time to remind themselves and others about the importance of good physical health. On this day, some communities invite health care professionals to speak about health issues that may be impacting their communities.

Some faith communities sponsor health fairs (in the days leading up to Health Day) during which members of the surrounding community, as well as members of the congregation, may receive basic health care such as blood pressure checks, blood testing, and eye exams. During this time attendees may also get advice about how to cook healthy meals and how to start and maintain an exercise regime.

By drawing attention to the importance of physical health, Christians are reminded that though our spiritual well-being is very important, it is not more important than our physical well-being. We must glorify God not only with our hearts and minds but with our bodies as well.

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

As I write this commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, more than forty-six million Americans do not have health insurance coverage,¹ and another twenty-five million are underinsured. Without adequate health care, even the simplest of physical ailments can become serious. Without adequate health care, chronic conditions (which could be treated if more resources were available) sometimes lead to prolonged illness or death. Prolonged and severe illness can, in turn, lead to financial peril in the form of financial exigency and/or bankruptcy. As the country decides whether adequate health care is a right or a privilege, it is important to remind ourselves to do all we can to take care of our bodies.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

In 1 Corinthians 19, Paul informed his followers that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit. Paul's language is very important. He did not say that their bodies are "like" temples, he wrote that their bodies "were" temples. In order to fully understand the importance of what Paul is saying, we must remind ourselves about the purpose and function of temples in the lives of the people in the text.

Solomon built a temple of great splendor and majesty. The temple was lined with cedar. The inner sanctuary was overlaid with pure gold. All of the furnishings and worship artifacts were also made of pure gold. Once built, in addition to being a place of splendor, the temple became a center of worship and renewal in the daily lives of the Hebrew people. In the temple, the people worshipped God with singing, harps, lutes and cymbals.² Priests made sacrifices on the altar of the temple to atone for the sins of the people, while they also continually attended to the temple's physical upkeep. The temple was a place of worship that needed constant attention to be the place of worship and spiritual renewal God intended it to be.

Just as the temple of God needed constant attention to continue to be a place of worship and renewal, so too do our bodies. Perhaps Paul was reminding his audience that having bodies came with responsibility. Each of them was responsible for tending to the well-being of her or his body so that their bodies could glorify God or reflect the splendor of God in every way. We, too, like Paul's audience, must attend to the upkeep of our bodies. We should eat well – but in moderation. We should exercise – but within the limits our own physicalities.

In 1 Kings 5:3-4, Solomon explained that his father David could not build a temple in his lifetime because there was no peace. David was constantly at war. The temple of God could survive and thrive in an environment of peace and tranquility. Just as peace was essential to the building and sustaining of the temple, peace is essential for the welfare of our bodies. A body not at peace is similar to a boat that develops a leak. If the leaks continue too long, eventually the boat will sink. If we truly believe that our bodies are temples, we should seek peace in all things, in our relationships, in our communities and in our world.

Perhaps Paul's most urgent exhortation about how the Corinthians should treat their bodies is found in verse 12, "'All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be dominated by anything." Some commentators believe that "all things are lawful" was a common saying that people of Corinth used to justify their behaviors.³ By using this phrase, the Corinthians were exerting liberties, as free people, to live as they pleased. While Paul cited this colloquialism in his writing, he made it conditional.

On the one hand, Paul believed that followers of Christ had certain liberties. For example, in 1 Cor. 7, Paul instructed his followers to no longer be concerned about consuming food sacrificed to idols. Though it was prohibited in the law, the liberty they experienced in Christ allowed them to eat all food without fear that their bodies would be defiled. On the other hand, Paul believed that this newfound liberty was not boundless. Those who chose to follow Christ had been bought with a price. Therefore, their bodies were no longer their own – they belonged to Christ. They were not to allow anyone or anything, outside of Christ, to dominate or control them.

We, like the Corinthians, should not allow anyone or anything outside of Christ to dominate us. The world in which we live is dynamic and ever-changing. We could easily become consumed or distracted by many things that are harmful to our health. We could allow unhealthy food, unhealthy relationships and overindulgence in activities such as surfing the internet, talking on our cell phones, texting, watching television, working, and shopping, etc., to consume us to such an extent that we miss opportunities to listen to and be led by the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit; without the Holy Spirit Christians are left without the guidance, the energy and the restraint to live the full life that God desires for them. Like the Corinthians, we get to choose. Why not choose to live the best life that you can which means living the healthiest and the holiest life possible?

Celebration

God has given each of us bodies that are temples of the Holy Spirit. We celebrate our bodies and all that Christ is doing in them and through them. We celebrate our bodies and all that Christ will do in them. We celebrate our ability to walk. We celebrate our ability to talk. We celebrate being clothed in our right minds. We celebrate health and strength. We celebrate being temples of the living God every day of our lives.

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details in this passage include:

Sounds: Gasps, moans and groans from the Corinthians as they read Paul's letter. They were probably surprised to read that their bodies were temples of God. They could no longer use their bodies in any way they wanted;

Sights: Puzzled and startled looks, erratic body movements that indicate discomfort; and

Smells: Bread, food and wine. This letter was likely read in a house church where meals may have been shared.

Notes

1. Baucus, Max. "Doctors, Patients, and the Need for Health Care Reform." The New England Journal of Medicine 10 (2009): 1056. Online location: <http://healthcarereform.nejm.org/?p=2137> accessed 21 December 2009
2. I Maccabees 4:41-58.
3. Collins, Raymond F., and Daniel J. Harrington. First Corinthians. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999. p. 243.