

The Image of God and our bodies

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I. God's 'glory story' is the greatest reclamation project conceivable; He is recovering His image through His Son.

As the image of God, man possesses aspects of human nature not shared by animals (Gen 1:26-27). Those include moral consciousness, abstract reasoning, understanding of beauty and emotion, an eternal soul, and above all, the capacity for worshipping and loving God. Man created in the image God points to the day when the eternal Son of God would come to earth as the perfect image of God and receive the human nature given Him by the Father (Heb 10:5; Luke 1:35; Col 1:15). Bearing God's image is at the very core of our identity and purpose as human beings. Our identity as His image means we must know God to know ourselves (Rom 1:18-21, 32; 2:14-1).

Since man is the image of God, sin is always the misrepresentation of God. Our moral duty is to be like Him in holiness, to reflect His character (1 Pet 1:15-16; Eph 5:1). Our sin misrepresents what God is like. This is why sin is so serious in God's eyes. We are made to represent His character; He can't be indifferent toward sin. We were created in His image to commune with Him, to share His purposes, and to share His dominion. The image of God places man in covenant relation to God—we are obligated to interpret all the works of God truthfully to the glory of God. It means that man's faculties are designed to receive divine revelation.

But, fallen man bears a distorted image of God. That image, therefore, needs to be renewed through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). God's wonderful plan in the Gospel is to restore sinners to the true image of God through Christ who is the perfect image of God (2 Cor 4:4-6). The Scriptures indicate that both body and soul are *for the Lord* (1 Cor 6:13). Redemption in Christ 'stamps' the image of God upon us afresh. Now as God's possession, we are called to live as the image of God in the power of the Spirit (Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7).

II. A disconnect between faith and life is an 'entry gate' for sexual sin.

A Gnostic-like disconnect is re-emerging in the church today. The attitude of ancient Gnosticism was: "Since they had received divine knowledge and were enlightened, it didn't matter how they lived in the body." "[A]scetic Gnosticism attempts to escape the material world, *antinomian Gnosticism* recognizes the impossibility of such a task [and concludes that] the un-spirituality of the material realm is not problematic, rather [it is] *without consequence*. Therefore, what one does in the body doesn't matter; hence anything goes—sexual immorality, whatever."¹ Modern *antinomian Gnostics* place a low level of significance upon our *embodiedness*. Their

approach that “the heart only matters” is part of the ‘grand divorce’ that justifies severing personal behavior from God’s standards of design, truth, beauty, and morality.

In our idolatrous culture, the divinely imposed values of self-control, delayed gratification, and the indirect pursuit of pleasure are colliding head on with the values of boundless self-expression. Our calling as image-bearers is to thrive within divinely ordained limits. As creatures made in God’s image “we are regents, stewards who are bounded by God’s good and wise laws. The Fall is the story of abandonment of limits in the name of freedom.”²

Darwinism claims to have a scientific explanation of entire our human existence and experience. The net effect in the minds of most was to replace biblical cosmology with a material worldview. God as personal, transcendent, involved with creation was demoted.³ Evangelicals began to divide God’s role—they saw Him as active in redemption, but allowed science to define the creation, and psychology to define behavior.⁴ When one allows the Bible to describe salvation and science to comprehensively describe the creation, it produces a tear in our thinking. For the salvation-science dichotomy pictures God as having two radically different faces—the side of God that dealt with creation was far less personal than the side of God that dealt with salvation. God’s plan of, “the proper constraint of creature before [his sovereign] Creator” becomes obscured. The greatest goal then becomes, *what’s good for me*—because there is no transcendent meaning remaining.⁵

How does this divided view of reality manifest itself in Evangelicalism?

Redemption tends to be viewed as a private, subjective, and personal—as if existing solely in the mind and the heart—as if concrete reality is the physical universe and salvation belongs to the private and the subjective. Accommodation to this *divided view of truth*, has pushed redemption further into the ‘upper story’ of subjective experience—causing the loss of the cosmological foundation for redemption.

III. Growing up without biblical cosmology is the phenomenon of being Christian, yet ‘metaphysically lost’.

The absolute truth of cosmology is essential in interpreting the universe.⁶

Cosmology is that branch of philosophy which deals with the origin and structure of the universe. At the heart of biblical cosmology are the Creator-creature distinction, and the creation of male and female as the image of God. The Creator’s relation to creation is the ordering principle of the universe and of reality. In the study of biblical cosmology, we learn that the Creator has set forth His ‘blueprint’ for His creation. His blueprint for mankind is not only our moral map but is our fixed point of reference which provides our understanding of the nature of reality (see Psalm 96).

Most believers can attest that they began with soteriology instead of cosmology. As a result, the doctrine of salvation was easily privatized (reduced to merely inward,

personal, and pietistic). Without the unifying foundation of cosmology, the rising generation hears biblical principles as disassociated bits and pieces of moral truth—instead of seeing God’s moral blueprint and creation structures as reality grounded in the transcendent character of God. Without biblical cosmology, we cannot see God’s moral blueprint as the genuine structure of reality, the very furniture of the universe.

IV. The human body, ‘commuter vehicle’ or center of personality and moral volition? What is the significance of being embodied?

A fragmented worldview without a biblical cosmology will ultimately affect the way one views the human body. Consequently, human sexuality is being redefined—taken out of its moral context and framework of divine design. As sexuality is reinterpreted according to the worldview of popular culture, we are seeing a new definition of freedom joined to it. The devil’s ‘cosmology’—which infers that happiness may be found through *freedom from design*—in the biblical worldview and cosmology mankind finds *freedom to design* (or freedom *in* God’s design).

Evangelicalism’s accommodation to the modern, or two-level view of reality, has pushed redemption further into the ‘upper story’. Christians are living in a state of détente with the open gash of dualism. The culture’s wrong-headed ideas about spirituality have slipped into the backdoor of the church and are contributing to the misunderstanding of the body. Consequently, the human body is viewed as either as spiritually debased and valueless, or as separate from the personality—the locus of moral decisions. Author Randy Alcorn has coined a term for the spiritual-physical disconnect life view—it is “christo-platonism” (a spirit-body dichotomy patterned after Plato’s philosophy but incorporated into Christianity). In his book, *Heaven*, Alcorn notes that a dichotomized view of the spiritual world and material world is prevalent among Americans. He states that among Americans who believe in the resurrection, two thirds believe we won’t have bodies after the resurrection—to have bodies that eat and walk in a physical paradise just sounds so unspiritual!⁷ *Christo-platonism* views the material realm with its experiences, blessings, and human relationships as “God’s competitors, rather than as instruments that communicate His love and character.”⁸

The culture’s wrong-headed ideas about spirituality are contributing to Christians’ misunderstanding of the body. The devaluing of the human body among professing Christians is a symptom of “christo-platonism” says Alcorn. “From the christo-platonism perspective, our souls merely occupy our bodies *like a hermit crab inhabits a seashell*. And [once those bodies are sloughed off,] our souls could naturally, even ideally live in a disembodied state.”⁹ Needless to say, a Christian holding to this view will won’t live a spiritually holistic (unified) life (2 Cor 5:1-10ff.).

The biblical doctrine of the soul-body unity preserves the truth that the human body was created to be the vehicle of human personality. It is biblical to say that the

human form was created for an interactive relationship with God. To abandon this unified view of human nature is to jeopardize the nature of true spirituality. The Gnostic view regards spirituality as something wholly inward—that divorces the use of the body from its role in true spirituality—biblically that role of course expresses itself in corporate relational spirituality.¹⁰ In Romans 12:1-2ff. we present our *bodies* as a living sacrifice—then you will find your place in the Body of Christ. Life as a living sacrifice immediately translates into the discovery of your contribution to the body in service. But, it is common in Evangelicalism to “view the human body as merely physical; a mere mechanical device.”

The Gnostic view of the body runs consistently against the grain of the revealed Word, a spiritual outlook that elevates both. According to the Word, a personal God intentionally created the physical universe, and it was from the beginning essentially good. Human physical existence—our embodiment—is purposeful and meaningful, not a cosmic accident. People have a body that we might have at our disposal the resources that would allow us to be persons in fellowship and cooperation with a personal God. The other spirituality’s relative disregard for physical experience challenges this view of the body, as well as the possibility of the individual’s fellowship and cooperation with a personal God.¹¹

V. Ethical symptoms of disconnect—the ‘pornification’ of a generation.

The epidemic of Evangelicals committing fornication and viewing pornography may be the most telling symptom of the Gnostic disconnect. Runaway porn use among Evangelicals is not merely attributable to technical advances which have increased both availability and anonymity. The spirit-body dichotomy contributes to *the disconnect* between faith and practice found in the lives of so many believers. If you live with the spirit-body dichotomy, you are much more likely to let down the ‘drawbridge’ of the heart allowing the perimeter around the soul to be breached by sensuality.

Al Mohler has warned that the pervasive plague of pornography represents one of the greatest moral challenges faced by the Christian church in the postmodern age. Eroticism has been woven into the very heart of the culture. And, concerning its breadth of impact upon our culture and our perceptions, he says, “The effects of the sin of pornography extend to almost every area of a person’s life. Instead of pointing the sex drive to covenant fidelity in marriage, it degrades that drive into a sinful passion that robs God of His glory. Pornography represents one of the most insidious attacks upon the sanctity of marriage and the goodness of sex within the one-flesh relationship. It is the celebration of debauchery rather than purity, and it leads to incalculable harm because it subverts marriage and the marriage bond.”¹²

Mohler rightly notes that pornography declares war on God’s great purpose of

glorifying Himself through the marriage bond. marriage is not merely the [lawful] arena of sexual activity, it is presented in Scripture as the arena for the display of God's glory on earth as a man and a wife come together in a one-flesh relationship. Rightly understood and rightly ordered, marriage is a picture of God's covenant faithfulness—revealing God's good gifts to His creatures and protecting humans from the disaster that follows when sexual passions are divorced from their rightful place.¹³

God's gift of sexuality is designed to pull us out of ourselves and our self-occupied concerns and desires and toward our spouse. The man committed to sexual purity is living in a state of sexual integrity toward his wife. In pursuing their mutual pleasure in the marriage bed, the husband “is careful to live, to talk, to lead, and to love in such a way that his wife finds her fulfillment in giving herself to him in love.” Their marital relations then become “the fulfillment of the entire relationship, and not an isolated physical act of self-centered personal pleasure.

This is significant for how we are to understand the unity of God's plan for husband and wife. Marital relations, as God designed them, are *character-building* and *culture-making*. These relations are character-building because a man brings his entire lifestyle of masculine responsibility to the marriage bed. And marital relations are culture-making because emotional and spiritual bonding takes place—essential to the building up the family environment in which children are nurtured and instructed so as to develop the ability to shape culture.¹⁴

VI. The Gnostic disconnect is widened by techno-consumer culture.

The screen has been framed as the real world—we have gone from Windows as a ‘window’ to the world—to Windows is the world. The screen has become the world. The screen is moving ever closer to the brain. The fighter pilot of previous wars looked out of his windscreen at the enemy. Now the display is often on the canopy of the cockpit—and of late a pilot may view a screen display on special contact lenses. The screen “presents a limited visual space that [increasingly stands for] our entire visual plane. The screen is more than a window on the world, the screen *is* the world, as it is.”¹⁵ “The screen has become the visual space, visuality itself”¹⁶ (Grant Horner).

The ‘pornification of culture’ is shaping the way in which this society approaches sexual curiosity and the way in which it invents itself sexually. Popular French philosopher, Michel Foucault's vision of freedom without truth has radically desecralized the body and sent the message of *no consequence sex*. The result is a generation immersed in erotica—with mangled lives to show for it.¹⁷ The sexual compromise of internet porn makes a man ‘mute’ for Christ. It makes his sword of truth inactive corroding it to its scabbard where it sits useless and idle.

VII. How do we get faith and life ‘reconnected’ again?

Sexual sin is actually a dysfunction in worship. Sexual idolatry is the activity of seeking integration by means of a substitute god. Sexual healing requires that we be trained again in the proper worship of God. A heart trained in delight in God finds the promises of sin unimpressive.¹⁸ God has a glorious “greater vision” for our humanness. When we give sexual relations the greater vision God has for it, its sinful imitation loses its luster. This is foundational to the healing of sexual brokenness. There is healing in Christ for shattered lives and that healing involves praise and affirmation for God’s design of male and female in a covenant of spiritual oneness.

Believers trapped in sensual patterns need a biblical strategy that is holistic. Repent of idolatry, retrain in worship; rebuild the biblical view of sexuality; and reclaim the truth that our body is a chief spiritual resource. A weak grasp of God’s vision for male and female is symptomatic of the fact that contemporary Christianity is starving for cosmology. Too many professing believers have added God to their lives. In a narcissistic fashion they have asked, “Where does God fit into my life?” They should be asking the cosmological question, “Where does my life fit into this great story of God’s mission?” The Bible is “the real story of reality to which we are called to conform ourselves.”¹⁹ That biblical vision for life has the power to blast us out of our false dichotomies. Christians need to hear what a spiritual resource their bodies are!

VIII. The human body, ‘beast of burden,’ or spiritual resource?

Our bodies are to be used for the spiritual ends for which we were saved, that is the Holy Spirit’s goal. When I as a believer consecrate myself to God, I must be aware that “surrender of self is inseparable from giving up my body to Him in such a way that it can serve both Him and me as a common abode, as John 14:23, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, and Ephesians 2:22 testify.”²⁰ It is common for believers to contemplate salvation apart from creation (cosmology), it is also common for believers to buy into an other worldly brand of spirituality that is inward, private, and compartmentalized. This is one of the key factors in producing a disconnect between body and spirit in the mind of a believer. When the doctrine of salvation is not anchored in cosmology, it opens the door to a mind-body dichotomy. Central to the cure for *the disconnect* is a hearty willingness to embrace God’s great blueprint and comprehensive plan for our whole existence.²¹

Scripture calls believers to regard their bodies as a great spiritual resource. The divine purpose of the human body is central to biblical worldview. Scripture tells us that “the body is for the Lord” (1 Cor 6:13), and that through the reality of organic living union with Christ, we are “members of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15). By living according to this perspective, we guard against the notion that the “spiritual is something wholly inward, or just kept between the individual and God.”²² Thus, to view the body as a spiritual resource is to live the Christian life holistically. That mindset is in touch with

the reality that true spirituality involves a huge corporate, social dimension in which one's body is used in Christian fellowship. The body is made available to Christ as we exercise our spiritual gifts—others are edified and served in the process as we offer our body back to God as a “living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1-2).²³ It is the dedication of our bodies so that we enjoy fulfilling our part in the life of the corporate body—when we employ that mentality, we are cognizant that our gifts function in a complementary manner unto the edification of the body (Rom 12:4-6ff.).

Our rising generation has been so indoctrinated with disconnect ideology, we need constant reminders that the body is the battlefield of worldview. The Apostle Paul uses language to evoke powerful imagery in Romans 6:13—he calls the members of our bodies, “weapons” to be used for righteousness. So paramount is the concept of body as instrument of righteousness that the principle of presentation is cast as an “either-or” proposition. Believers are to yield, or present, the members of their bodies. If Christians do not regard their bodies to be a resource of spiritual life as God intends, then they will despise the spiritual significance their bodies.²⁴ A “de-sacralization” of the body will be a natural consequence. By “desacralize” is simply meant to discount the role of the body in our “spiritual service of worship.” Desacralization of the body often means that the believer regards his or her body to be a hindrance to true spirituality rather than a pivotal resource to true spirituality!

We need to recapture the necessity and priority of transformation by God's truth. Many, if not most of us have received salvation truths ‘devotionally’ that are disconnected from cosmology—disconnected from the transcendence of God. Consequently, these truths lack the transcendent cause necessary to order, animate, and constrain their lives.²⁵ Without the doctrine of transcendence, salvation truths are thrust into an upper story subjective category, divorced from the divine blueprint found in biblical cosmology. A disconnect follows which is characterized by distancing spiritual truth from the everyday decisions of life. What are we seeing? A generation seeking an identity of self through consumption (trends, media, badges of identity, etc.) rather than upon the Creator's story.

IX. Reuniting reality by worshipping the Lord of reality.

Christ does what Plato and the Greek philosophers could not do, He unifies all reality. He links visible and invisible reality. He reconciles singularity and plurality. He gives harmony, unity, and order to the cosmos. The Son connects the realms of *being* (permanence) and *becoming* (change). According to Colossians 1:15-20, Christ has “first place” in every realm; visible and invisible. There is no dichotomy.²⁶ Paul commands the Corinthians to regard no one from the perspective of the old worldview anymore (2 Cor 5:16).²⁷

It is all too common for believers to see obedience as a narrow bandwidth and not whole life affections. The assumptions of popular culture only deepen this misconception that life may be successfully divided up by means of a sacred-secular split. God's claims upon us in Christ blast into our false sacred-secular dichotomy—telling us that the Lord claims every square foot of our life experience for Himself. Biblical worldview blasts us out of dualistic thinking. The incarnation does not let us partition reality into spiritual and non-spiritual spheres but shows us that all reality flows from one integrative source. Christians are to develop a holistic worldview by critical reflection on life in light of the incarnation of Christ.²⁸ How? By studying and proclaiming the full-orbed gospel of Christ—who is both Creator and Redeemer. Only then will they be able to abandon all disconnects and enjoy a unified Christian experience. Christ's supremacy unifies our worldview:

Christ is like the sun in our solar system. In this analogy, planets represent the goals, desires, and responsibilities of the believer. Christ's majesty is like the blazing glory and gravitational pull of the sun; the orbits of the planets are held and guided by His preeminence. When Christ is central in our lives; the 'planets' of our desires and goals and labors are ordered by Christ and put into their proper orbits. When we are captivated by the supremacy of Christ and ravished by all that God is toward us in Christ and all that He has promised to be toward us in Christ, then our hearts are enlarged to take in more of our Lord. The more that happens, the more the soul is broadened to take in the majesty of our God. As we grow in that direction; God is big; and lusts are small – sexuality, with its 'little' thrill, assumes its proper size and orbit in our life; sexual lust loses its power over us. . . The human heart was made to be lost in wonder, love, awe, and praise – to be staggered by the supremacy of Christ. The deepest cure for sexual lust is to be emotionally staggered and rocked by the supremacy of Christ. The sheer weight of Christ and eternity constitutes the gravity of what life is all about. So heavy is that weight, that to have felt the tiniest portion of it makes it almost emotionally impossible to go to the internet to view porn (John Piper).²⁹

X. Biblical cosmology is our lens for viewing ultimate reality.

When we analyze life by means of the authoritative perspective of biblical cosmology, there is an intensely satisfying intellectual fulfillment in seeing the unity of all knowledge and the wisdom of divine purposes. By contrast, sexual impurity says in effect, "I accept the devil's cosmology." The devil's initial temptation was a solicitation to believe that beauty can safely and happily exist when removed from its divine moral context. Porn deconstructs creational structures, and biblical theism is eroded in the process. Cosmology and biblical theism belong together, you can't have

one completely intact without the other. God's creational structures (or cosmology) state that beauty has no existence independent from the Creator. Beauty in its divinely ordained moral context of truth and moral order gives glory to God. We love this beauty for the sake of God's glory and not merely for its own sake.

This is why beauty is the battleground for the souls of men and women. As it was in the beginning with the lie in Eden, beauty was the battlefield. Satan traps, enslaves, dupes, and leads into idolatry by removing beauty from the very transcendentals necessary for beauty to point to the glory of God. The deceiver infers that beauty can stand alone and be indulged in by itself. The gospel delivers from this lie by placing us in Christ and causing us to discern all things from the perspective of the mind of Christ (1Cor 2:12-16).

Idolatry defaces the image of God in man. Lucifer's express purpose is to work against God's announced purpose of making man and woman in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26-28). The evil one cannot change our ontology or human make up directly, but he can deface it indirectly. His tool of choice is idolatry. Idol worship in all its forms mars, mangles, and fragments the image of God in us. The devil, murderer of souls (Jn 8:44) used the ancient lie to sever us from the knowledge of God, and to attach us to the world as our 'preferred source of fulfillment.' Satan's hatred of God is expressed in his malevolent wish to shatter the image of God. The evil one uses lust to make us listless and apathetic about our freedom, he wants us to drop our diligence and to devalue our liberty. He knows we are created to be worshippers and that we will serve what we worship. Thus, idolatry is inseparable from bondage. When we take the glory, attention, adoration, and devotion that belongs to God and give it to created things we are committing idolatry. Idolatry weakens the very things that true worship is designed to strengthen: our freedom and liberty in Christ, unity of our Christian experience, humanness, and our ability to reflect God's character as His image.

Biblical cosmology helps us burst the issue of mortification of sexual sin out of too small a category—we have tended to treat it as “just my private bosom sin and personal heart struggle.” No! Cosmology smashes through this artificial disconnect and shrunken perspective by bringing us face to face with God's infinite wisdom in founding reality upon His all-wise creational structures. Man is a 'bounded' creature. This is at the heart of our creaturehood and our humanness. As the only order of creatures made in the divine image, we must find our purpose in our creational identity—that identity being to reflect the moral majesty of our Creator. Therefore, when by Christ's redeeming work and the Spirit's power our lives are aligned with His creational purposes, designs, relations, and boundaries, we will be giving glory to God.

Endnotes:

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- ¹ Tim Gallant, "Material Girls and Boys," (www.truth-and-beauty.com) p. 1
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ James White, *Alpha Omega Ministries*, 11/5/08 webcast
- ⁶ Dave Doveton.
- ⁷ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004), pp. 52, 112
- ⁸ Ibid, p. 176
- ⁹ Alcorn, p. 112
- ¹⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Harper and Row, San Francisco, CA, 1988) p. 77
- ¹¹ James Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2003) p. 271
- ¹² Ibid., p. 2
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Vishal Mangalwadi, missionary to India
- ¹⁵ Grant Horner, "Theorizing the Weightless Rhetoric of the Digital Spatialization of Knowledge," (The Master's University, Santa Clarita, CA, 2007), p. 5
- ¹⁶ Ibid, p. 8
- ¹⁷ *Telling the Truth*, D. A. Carson, Gen. Ed. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), pp. 24, 83
- ¹⁸ Greg Johnson, *The World according to God* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2002) pp. 141-142
- ¹⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (InterVarsity Press Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2006), pp. 533-534
- ²⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, CA, 1988), pp. 30-31
- ²¹ Greg Johnson, p. 21
- ²² Dallas Willard, pp. 76-77
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid, pp. 89-90
- ²⁵ Ibid, pp. 125, 128
- ²⁶ Norman Klassen and Jens Zimmerman, *The Passionate Intellect* (Baker Publishing), pp. 30-31
- ²⁷ Ibid, p. 151
- ²⁸ Ibid, pp. 186-187, 195
- ²⁹ John Piper, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, Conference, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN