

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. V.—“PRESENT YOUR BODIES”—A NEW YEAR’S HOMILY.¹

THE language of religion is wont, perhaps too often, to speak of man as a soul. It is partly, no doubt, the result of a wish to insist upon that which the careless may forget, and to emphasize the immortal in man in distinction from the frail and changeful body. But it may unintentionally have aided these partial views of Christian truth which allow men to accept as inevitable acts which in their commonest form are often lightly dismissed as mere infirmities, and in their fullest development become rank antinomianism. If any persons were minded to think that the Gospel of Christ carried no message for their bodies, this use might help them.

But for no such view could Holy Scripture be summoned in witness. Whether we recall the language of the Prophets as to the Messiah, the words of our Lord Himself, the characteristics of His ministry, or the teaching of His Apostles, nothing can warrant such an assumption. Holy Scripture may inculcate the humility proper to the spirits which dwell in houses of clay (Job xiii. 12), in tenements as easily overthrown as a tent (2 Cor. v. 1). It may caution us against over-anxiety in caring for the body (Matt. vi. 5); against allowing it to be under the dominion of sin (Rom. vi. 12); against surrendering it to evil instead of consecrating it to God (1 Cor. vi. 13); against the peril of permitting a single member (*e.g.*, the tongue, Jas. iii. 6) to escape our control. But Holy Scripture has also other things to say. Christ is presented as the Saviour of the believer’s body (Eph. v. 23), which is a member of Christ (1 Cor. vi. 15), a temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. vi. 19), may be the instrument by which God is glorified (1 Cor. vi. 10), and by which the life-giving power of Christ is manifested (2 Cor. iv. 10); is destined to share in the Resurrection (1 Cor. xv. 42-44), indeed to be made like unto the body of the risen Lord (Phil. iii. 21).

St. Paul, too, has another figure under which the dignity of the body is expressed. He bids us “present” it “a living sacrifice,” and he calls this our reasonable, rational “service.” It was a figure which would appeal to some early believers. Men then, like men now, differed in temperament. Some then, as some now, found themselves attracted by ritual. The Jew who believed might miss the ritual of the old dispensation, though he assented to its typical character. The Gentile might crave something which filled the place of old

¹ “I beseech you . . . present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.”—ROM. xii. 1.

and familiar ceremonies. St. Paul seizes upon the old habit and converts it to his own use. If any desire a ritual here is a cultus of a new order. They can offer a sacrifice to God, the sacrifice of their bodies, an offering God will accept—a rational and seemly *λατρεία* on their part.

The season of Christmas and the New Year may well put every Christian believer in mind of the extreme urgency of this appeal. At a time when "for us men and for our salvation" our Lord Jesus Christ "came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man," the call to glorify God in our bodies, "which are His," can hardly be absent from our minds. Perhaps it will be all the more definitely before us because the development which has so largely marred a Christian festival by circumstances of almost pagan self-indulgence must imply a call to those who would rescue the season for something higher than feasting and merry-making. Christ, once seen in the flesh on earth, now ascended up on high, has to be manifested in His people, revealed in their lives, preached by their conduct and words, glorified in their actions. It befits us, then, to ask ourselves whether our own use of the body suggests to others as well as to ourselves this willing sacrifice.

In what spirit is our body used? Have we realized all our responsibility in respect of that body, or for the bodies of others in the world?

The profligate, the undisguised sensualist, the glutton and the hard drinker, following in part the primitive instincts of the brute, yet neglecting the self-control which even the brute can show, exhibit to us in some of its most revolting forms the lower side of man's fallen nature. These need no moralist to declare their dishonour of the body. But facile denunciation of them may go with other offences scarcely less serious in themselves and their issues. Short of these gross sins, others exist which cannot be set aside as mere foibles or infirmities of no importance. Over-anxiety, pride of person or adornment, and keen enjoyment of the pleasures of the table may still exist, even amongst those who meet for worship in churches. The warning against over-anxiety for the body, against undue regard for it, is not superfluous even now. The man who sinks into an anxious valetudinarian is calling all to witness the weakness of his faith, or his lack of faith at all. The man or woman who becomes a humble attendant upon the whims of fashion, a kind of slave under the austere rule of tailor or dressmaker, is in spirit an idolater. In such cases the life makes it hard for any to associate the thought of sacrifice with the use of the body. Where is the offering?

There is another extreme. The over-anxiety or sensual

solicitude of the one may be matched with utter forgetfulness in another. The body is wholly uncared for, merely because the mind is preoccupied with affairs. That is in an age of extreme competition and over-pressure a common failing. Doctors all around us are patching up the frames of men whose physical sufferings are the direct and obvious outcome of contempt for God's laws as to the use of the body. There is nothing heroic in wearing out in toil for selfish ends the body or the mind, or in handing down to posterity enfeebled frames and impaired or distorted intellects. If there be any sacrifice here it is to self. God's law directs the body to be kept at its best, that it may be used for Him. This is using it as a slave to do the bidding of self.

There are others who err from a sensitive conscience which has been wrongly treated. In the spirit of some ancient philosophers they have come to think of the body only as a clog upon the soul, only as the subject of temptation, only as a hateful garment which cannot too soon be thrown off. Thus, it seems, they think of the body formed in the likeness of God; the body honoured by Christ when He took our nature upon Him; the body in which the Holy Spirit may dwell as in a temple. Pagans may thus think; but it is ground upon which the Christian man must walk warily, even when, like St. Paul, he is most conscious of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. At least, we may ask ourselves in what sense the body thus regarded could be presented to God. Such an offering would be, it is clear, not of our best, but of our worst; the giving away of the thing dishonoured and despised.

Let us turn from this negative view to ask ourselves what we are doing. What is the Christian law of the body? How far are we frankly seeking to obey it?

Our members are instruments of the will. Is the will submitted to the will of God? There must be readiness both to abide by and to do the will of God, even as Christ did the will of the Father. That submission can only come of faith. But he who definitely trusts the word and power of God can submit with a light heart. "I am Thine, save me" (Ps. cxix. 94), may be his cry. His defence is now with God, though vigilance and all that the Holy Spirit directs must be exerted by him. Every believing man's experience assures him that this new power is absolutely needful for the conflict with temptation. It is idle for anyone to sit down and suppose that by careful regard to secular considerations he can secure immunity in the face of temptation. A moment of severer trial, a gust of passion, a fit of perversity, may scatter his resolutions like chaff. He needs a regenerate will to govern that body of his, the conflict with which, trying him

by its weakness (Matt. xxvi. 41), by some special frailty (2 Cor. xii. 7), or by the unceasing strife of the lower nature against the dominion of the Spirit (Rom. vii.), can only issue in assured victory to the man who has consciously resigned himself into the keeping of God.

The body, then, as the instrument of a regenerate will, must be employed in the service of God. It cannot be left only active in the pursuits which, though they may be followed to the glory of God, still connect themselves directly and naturally with self. The use of the body in the ordinary discharge of our duties is, indeed, a part of its service for God. But you will not always associate the thought of sacrifice with this. You may like work; it is no trial to discharge it honestly, to provide the full tale of bricks well made. Sheer idleness (save upon occasion) would be as irksome to one as hard labour to another. Beyond a doubt this ready, conscientious, single-hearted discharge of duty is, in the faithful, an offering to God. But the body as a sacrifice may give more than this; may cut off something of its just leisure for other work; may deny itself for the profit of others; may "be spent" in a service which has no relation to self-interest. Thus you have a double offering—the day's toil consciously offered to God; the sacrifice, made in no ascetic spirit, but in one of glad surrender, added thereto.

The whole field of social activity calls out for the intelligent influence of him who thus thinks of the body, and calls as clamorously as it ever did even in days of greater social peril and unrest. For he must not think only of himself, but also of others. Who that so honours the tenement in which God has placed his soul can look unmoved upon the world around him? I know not which sight is the more terrible—the pampered person of the utterly idle man or woman and the worn-out body of the profligate, or some poor starved frame—homeless, cold, and forgotten of man—that yields up its spirit in streets of a Christian city, itself to be the subject of an inquest, and the tenant of a pauper's grave.

But in every class there is crying need of those who, speaking to men's souls, will not omit to tell them of their bodies. The prodigality of the rich, the often merely careless wrong-doing of the leisured, the wasted time and the unemployed talents; the homes of the poor, the minds of the poor, the social instincts of the poor—these things cry out for the intelligent thought and care of the Christian citizen. It is not enough to ring the church bell, to open the mission-room door, to deliver your tract, to speak in your own words Christ's message of love, or to go yourself to church to worship in comfort and return to comfort again. You have to act as

those who would manifest to the world the Master Who fed the hungry, Who healed the sick, Who consoled the mourner; Who even now in the assize court of your own consciences calls you to witness whether, in the person of His "brethren" the poor, the sick, and the prisoner, the Lord Himself has had of your services. No man who has consciously laid hold of the promises of God and felt their sustaining power will ever do his brethren in the world the injustice of supposing that a Gospel of sanitation, education, and recreation can supply all their needs. But he will remember their nature. He will work "as well for the body as the soul." Shall he not with each New Year seek more fully to enter into the possibilities of his testimony in this aspect? In so doing, patiently watchful over his own members, and in the happy service of man, he will, indeed, offer the sacrifice of his body to Him Who one day "shall change" that "vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. iii. 21).

A. R. BUCKLAND.



ART. VI.—AMONG THE WATER-GIPSIES.

THE 1st of June, 1801, was a red-letter day for the inhabitants of the pretty little suburb of Paddington. Flags hung from nearly every house, the church bells were rung, and at intervals guns were fired. From Cornhill and Cheapside came City merchants in their private carriages or lumbering hackney-coaches, and hundreds of less wealthy people arrived on foot.

The cause of this excitement was the opening of the Paddington Canal, an event of very great importance in the eyes of business men. But it was not only business men who rejoiced. The Londoner who yearned to travel saw in the new canal a comparatively cheap way to gratify his desire, for on this day the first pleasure-barge arrived at Paddington Basin. It was crowded with passengers from Uxbridge, who spoke so enthusiastically of their pleasant journey that many Londoners there and then vowed to make a barge-trip at the first opportunity.

A hundred years have, however, made a great change in Paddington Basin and its neighbourhood. The fields which once surrounded it have long since disappeared, and big, unlovely factories and other business premises now hide it so completely from the public view that there are thousands of people who have lived for many years within the compass of