

Jehovah Hear Thee in Thy Grief (Psalm 20)

The Psalter, 1912

Jehovah hear thee in thy grief,
our fathers' God defend thee still,
send from His holy place relief,
and strengthen thee from Zion's hill.

Thy sacrifice may He regard,
and all thine off'rings bear in mind;
thy heart's desire to thee accord,
fulfilling all thou hast designed.

In thy salvation we rejoice,
and in God's name our banners raise;
Jehovah hearken to thy voice,
fulfill thy prayers through all thy days.

Salvation will the LORD command,
and His anointed will defend;
yea, with the strength of His right hand
from heav'n He will an answer send.

How vain their every confidence
who on mere human help rely;
but we remember for defense
the name of God, the LORD Most High.

Now we arise and upright stand,
while they, subdued and helpless fall;
Jehovah, save us by Thy hand,
the King give answer when we call.



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In the Nick of Time

Body, Soul, and Spirit, Part 5: Implications

Kevin T. Bauder

Scripture is clear that humans are not simply souls that inhabit bodies. Still less are they souls without bodies. The Bible teaches that the body is as much the person as the soul is. Body and soul are the inner and outer person. So important is the body to personal identity that God will raise it from the dead.

This biblical teaching raises certain questions. One is about the relationship of body to soul. According to the biblical vision, we must treat people as unities. Under normal circumstances, neither the outer nor inner person acts apart from the other. Soul affects body and body affects soul.

Hard monism reduces all inner activity to the fluctuations of matter. The Bible contradicts this theory. Christians insist that the mind is more than the cells of the brain. The Bible depicts the human spirit as the center of cognition. Yet the spirit—the inner person—is affected by the body. The mind does not usually operate detached from the brain. Fatigue and hunger can affect both thinking and feeling. When Elijah ran from Jezebel, God gave him food and rest before giving him answers or instruction (1 Kings 19).

What happens at death? Do we receive an intermediate body? Does God give us a temporary body between death and the resurrection? Some have argued from 2 Corinthians 5:1–8 that He does. But both body and soul are essential to human identity. Hence, the existence of an intermediate body is unlikely. 2 Corinthians 5 contrasts our present body with our resurrection body. It says nothing about an in-between, temporary body. If we are our body, we could hardly be ourselves while inhabiting some other body. We would not be us. The text promises resurrection after a temporary, disembodied existence. As disembodied souls, we are “found naked” and “unclothed” until the resurrection. Without our bodies, we lack an element of our identity. God will restore this element when He raises us.

Because humans are bodies as well as souls, we must never treat human bodies with contempt. Those who kill the body kill the image of God (Gen 9:6). Even after death, our bodies are still us. We must treat bodies with respect. Deliberate mutilation of a corpse is desecration. Moab burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime (Amos 2:1). God pronounced judgment

upon Moab for this desecration. Moab intended to show extreme contempt for an enemy. The contemptuous nature of the act elicited God's condemnation.

Does this text also forbid cremation? Here we must distinguish the act from the attitude that leads us to do it. Moab burned the king of Edom as an act of contempt. Yet not all burning of bodies is necessarily contemptuous. We find an analogy in the treatment of living bodies, which we must also treat with respect. To sever a healthy body part is mutilation, but to sever a gangrenous member is surgery. Mutilations are desecration, but surgeries are attempts at healing.

God intends the deceased to return to dust (Gen 3:19). Buried bodies usually return to dust rather slowly. Burned bodies also return to dust, but more rapidly. Incineration only speeds up the process. The resurrection will restore bodies that have decayed in the earth. It will also restore those consumed by fire. Otherwise, martyrs burned at the stake would have no hope. We bury some bodies in earth. We entomb some in mausolea. We submerge some in the sea. We incinerate some in flames. If the attitude is respectful, then the method of interment is indifferent.

We must also treat living bodies with respect. Our bodies are us. Whoever treats our bodies contemptuously desecrates them. Unnecessary removal of healthy organs is mutilation. People who cut themselves in self-loathing are desecrating their bodies.

Interestingly, Scripture does not view piercings as mutilations. Earrings and probably nose rings were prominent in the Old Testament. Both sexes wore these ornaments (Gen 24:22, 30, 47; Exod 32:2–3; 35:22; Prov 25:12; Ezek 16:12). Whether one should get a piercing depends on other considerations.

The fall has affected our bodies, sometimes disfiguring them. Infants are born with cleft palates and lips. Victims of fire or other mishaps may endure severe scars. Scoliosis twists the spine and hunches the shoulders. Repairing disfigurements to the body is right and good.

But we must never see our bodies as disfigurements in themselves. If our bodies are us, then we must accept them as gifts from God. Some bodies are short and others tall. Some are female and others male. Some are dark and others fair. Some are delicately framed and others are big boned. These are all givens in our lives (Matt 6:27). They are part of who we are. These realities must shape our inner sense of identity because they *are* our identity.

Sex is an aspect of embodiment. In sexed beings, gender connects directly to sex. Your sex identifies both you and your gender. It is part of who you are, and it is unchangeable. You can modify your body to resemble the opposite sex, but you cannot change your sex. Such alterations are always mutila-

tions. If your sense of who you are does not align with your body, you do not need chemical or surgical treatment. You need counsel.

Your body is not an illusion. It is a reality. It is your identity. It is you. You must treat it with respect, and you must insist that others do the same.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
