

Female body image and paul: corinthians 6:12-20



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The Female Body Image and Paul

Introduction

Our contemporary society plays a big role regarding how the female body should look like. All over our contemporary media especially in television, social media, movies and magazine covers, women have been portrayed very thin and sexualized showing off skin and heavy makeup. Men and women that see these types of women begin to idolize that body image and think that's what the ideal body should look like. Men visualize these types of women and think that all women should have this thin and sexualized appearance. This mentality where women think they need to be thin and sexy causes harms to their physical body if they go through extreme lengths to achieve it or men exploit their body and create the problem of toxic masculinity. There are many young girls who are exposed to this "ideal body image," giving them the idea that they must look like the models they see in media.

We should expand our spiritual understanding of body image and the church should start taking these issues seriously. We have to be willing to address issues that are not popular opinions instead of just preaching things that people want to hear. Church followers are exposed to these issues that directly against their deepest values. Most images that show thin sexualized women in our contemporary culture are not healthy, so the church needs to be aware of these influences shaping the future generations. The Church needs to have an honest analysis of itself referring to the parts of tradition that have made it difficult to feel good in our own skin. By addressing body

image issues, critically analyzing antibody messages in Christian tradition while finding body accepting outlooks can help the church deliver healthy attitudes towards women's bodies. *This paper will explore the concept of the female body socially and theologically, analyze competing claims on the female body and relate how a Christian can navigate the tensions by those claims and lastly draw connections of the female body to the writings of Paul focusing on 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20 .*

The Female Body: Socially and Theologically

Contemporary culture presents infinite images of what the ideal perfect woman looks like, implying that women are important if they are beautiful. Psychologist Melissa Milkie conducted a study regarding how women viewed their bodies reflecting off from mass media, " Incorporating social comparison and reflected appraisal processes, this study shows how media affect self-esteem indirectly, despite criticism, through beliefs about how others use and are affected by media." ^[1] This is a modern depiction of beliefs that identify women with their bodies, but the types of bodies women often look up to or aspire to be are not real and ideal. According to psychologist Melissa Milkie,

" I examine the case of pervasive beauty ideals disseminated through mass media, which many suggest are harmful to young women. These images, particularly in regard to body shape, are extremely unlike " real" American women. The gap between the image and the reality has grown in recent years, as the media images have become slimmer and Americans have grown heavier (Wiseman et al. 1992)." ^[2]

the issue of these unrealistic body images applies most directly to mass media and takes part where women judge each other lower their confidence of their body.

Women who see their body as "...fearfully and wonderfully made;" (Psalm 139: 14) should feel good about their bodies because they are made in the image of God. According to researchers at Biola University, believers who are both men and women who see their body as sinful are more likely to be ashamed of their body. ^[3] Over the decades, some Christians believe that the body is not part of the spirit because Jesus preached whatever part of your body causes you to sin you should cut it off. Specifically, Jesus said in Matthew 5: 30, " And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell." (Matthew 5: 30) Based from this verse believers see the body as a source of potential evil and temptation. Christian teaching also emphasizes how scared the body saying the body and soul are connected because humans are made in the image of God as Paul made clear in 1 Corinthians 6: 19. " Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;" (1 Corinthians 6: 19)

Competing Claims of the Female body

We as Christians tend to think that the body and spirit are different and that our bodies can get in the way of our spiritual development. This leads women to think that the body needs to be controlled but creates this dilemma of being obsessed with our physical bodies and forgetting about the

spirit. According to DeBraganza, “ Healthcare professionals and researchers have become increasingly interested in body dissatisfaction not only because of its high prevalence but because it is a risk and maintenance factor for eating disorders and other negative health issues.” [4] Women think their body is the primary source of their identity and placed value depending on how they look, subjecting to them being vulnerable. In mass media they portray these actresses and models as the standard of the perfect body, implying if you don’t look like them, then you are not good enough. “ First, social norms of the “ ideal body” are portrayed in the mass media by models and actors. These mass media ideals shape the standards toward which young women believe they must strive in their struggle for “ [5]

These ideas about women and body image are what set them up for eating disorders and body dissatisfaction that we see now. When you see workout videos, diet supplements or any clothing to make one appear thinner, the message women receive is the thinner the better. Having a thin body is the subject of control and women today experience not eating as a way of controlling their body. According to Klein, “ As a result of these psychological imbalances, anorexia, then, leads to a combination of extreme behaviors such as starvation or highly restrictive dieting in order to look a certain way or feel a sense of control over one’s body.” [6] Trying to achieve this thin body can be addicting goal and it creates a false god thinking being thin will make women feel valued and accepted. The further women go off the deep end by obsessing of being thin, the more it becomes a source of meaning losing connection to other goals and especially God.

When it comes to the issue's women face with the body, Christians can navigate those tensions by knowing people's bodies are united with Christ. "Christians are united to Christ; their bodies are members of Christ. They must glorify God in and with their body!" [7] In contrast a Christian's body is a temple of God created specifically by Him. According to Marshall, Paul wants both men and women to treat their body well by not having sexual behaviors, " In 1 Cor 6: 12-7: 7, BODY slides from one node of metaphor to the other in the phrase " members of Christ." Paul is concerned with both sexual behaviors of individual bodies and the effect of bodies upon Christ's body." [8] By following Paul's teachings, we should honor our bodies and resist the temptations such as sex.

The Pauline Discussion on 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20 and the Female Body

In 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20, Paul is addressing to the Corinthians about a particular sin that can negatively affect the believer's body. Paul is straightforward about the body when and maintains the unity of body and spirit for the Corinth church especially because of sexual immorality. " Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body." (1 Corinthians 6: 18) This passage is mainly addressed to the interior of our bodies because other sins that are committed outside it doesn't affect the body itself except for sexual sins. The problem women face today doesn't necessarily have to do with sexual sin but the exploitation of their exterior of their bodies because it is glorified by men and the media which negatively affects most women's mental health. When women's mental health are affected, it will

lead to them negatively affecting their bodies and Paul needs to help protect the body from these forces to maintain a level of decency that will allow the Spirit to dwell in us.

When Paul talks about the believer's body, he wants us to keep our body united, pure and have control over it. Paul goes into detail of women's bodies specifically, but first explains the believer's body and how it is Christ's body. Paul argues that when the believer's body is controlled, pure and untied, our bodies will please God. Brown states, "The body is not a neutral thing, placed between nature and the city. Paul set it firmly in place as a 'temple in the Holy Spirit.'" ^[9] Through this communication, Paul argues against the separation of body and soul and supports the unity between the two.

When Paul talks about purity it can be a form of protection and control, but it's mainly concerned with maintain its holiness in the reflection of God. Neyrey states in his academic journal, "Rules for the body and its orifice, moreover, are appropriate because for Paul individual bodies are not neutral or free but controlled. "Your body is not your own; you were bought with a price" (6: 19)." ^[10] Control is necessary because it will resist the temptations of sin that can negatively affect the body. Paul's teachings are mainly concerned of everyone's people either male or female but have a great purpose in maintaining the holiness of the social body. During Paul's time women are considered important in the community and Paul wants anyone who's a believer to keep their body united and whole. Paul does not exclude women in the struggles of the body because he applies the same logic, he

had for anybody that is a believer in Christ. Whether you are male or female it is important to take care of your body.

Conclusion

When Paul originally wrote to the Corinthians, it was to encourage them to not be divided and for them to be united. 1 Corinthians revealed Paul's understanding of the body teaching the importance of unity, purity and control. In addition, Paul taught us that there is no difference between our physical bodies on earth compared to the spiritual body because our bodies belong to Christ. How the teachings of Paul can help the tensions of women and their bodies is know that like men their bodies also belong to Christ. Women should not fall for the social pressures of being the ideal body type or worry what others think because ultimately it only matters what God thinks because it is His body. Women need to love themselves and feel good in their own bodies because if they don't do that then it will harm the body which will in the end harm themselves and their relationship with God. Paul helps outline the importance of the body by saying the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the disunited of the body will dishonor God. Through 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20, Paul's writings will help women who struggle with their bodies take care of themselves and strengthen their relationship with God.

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