

# Living with fallen and broken bodies

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Romans 8 verse 23, look at this. We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

! That's a great verse. Doesn't it match our experience, that? That with these God-given bodies of ours, now so weak and degraded and decaying, we groan. We groan.

In frustration and hurt, longing for our bodies to be made better. Don't we? Today is week two, it's week two of three in our short topical series, thinking about the human body, God and our bodies. And if you were here last Sunday, we spoke about these created and good bodies of ours. That is, our bodies aren't accident, they're not junk, they're not just packaging, they're not bad. No.

So, your loving maker knitted you together in your mother's womb. Our God is a designer, an artist, a sculptor. And he personally designed and formed you and your body.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] Your body, which is who you are, and good, and a good gift from God. The Bible has an incredibly high view of our bodies. Our friends and our culture and our world need to hear this.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made. And we're to thank God for this divine masterpiece. I should accept and enjoy and care for my body and live for my creator in and with this God-given body of mine.

But that's not all the Bible has to say. Because we live in a good created world that is now fallen and scarred by sin and despair and death, which includes our bodies too.

And so this morning, last week, having talked about our created good bodies, this morning we're talking about the reality of fallen and broken bodies. And before we get into it, may I say up front, I may touch briefly today on some things that might be quite personal and sensitive for us.

Painful even. There is a danger that you hear me speaking and moving too quickly. And that I speak too simply of issues that are complicated.

[ 2 : 3 4 ] And so a danger of my being insensitive too. And if that is the case, please forgive me and bear with me as I speak. Because what I want us to do is to grasp the large sweep of life in our bodies today.

Which will have all sorts of significant personal things to talk about. And there are two things I want to say this morning to grasp the large sweep of life in our bodies today. And the first thing is from Romans chapter 1 on page 1128.

So turn flick back there if you're still in Romans 8. Romans chapter 1 teaches us that we live in a world of darkened hearts and degraded bodies.

In Romans 1 verse 18 onwards, Paul speaks about God's wrath and anger against a world that's turned against him, our creator. And verse 21 describes this turning.

Such an important verse.

[ 3 : 4 1 ] As God's wrath and grace. As God's creatures with our God-given bodies, we should glorify him and give thanks to him gladly in our bodies, with our bodies. But when a human being turns from the living God and won't live for him and thank him, we fall inside ourselves.

We degenerate. We degenerate. We lose touch with reality. It says here in the verse that our thinking becomes futile.

Can't think straight anymore about the world and God and ourselves. And our foolish hearts are darkened. A darkness settles inside us.

And something very scary here in Romans 1 verse 21. Verse 22. Although they, human beings, claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

What Paul's talking about here is what the Bible calls idolatry. Foolish idolatry. Where in the language of verse 25, they exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

[ 5 : 02 ] And worshipped and served created things rather than the creator. What Paul's describing here is us, humanity, having turned away from God.

And he's saying that when we turn from worshipping our creator with our bodies, we end up with foolish thinking and darkened hearts, worshipping and serving other things.

Created things. For some people in history and around the world, bowing down before wooden statues and carved images. You are our God.

What? So foolish. Or maybe you think in 21st century Britain, you don't see much of that. But maybe one example of what we worship and serve apart from the creator, well maybe, don't we see a worshipping and serving of the body itself?

And think today of the present cult of beauty and fitness and youth. That in our culture, every celebrity must be toned and wrinkle free.

[ 6 : 10 ] And that's how it must be and should be for our bodies, we think. And so in every Instagram pose and Facebook post, how do I look?

What do other people think of me and my body? And so you're tempted to want to diet harder and train harder and spend more and buy other things to serve my body.

But the thing is, in a culture where we worship our bodies in some sense, any idol, any false god like that is such a harsh taskmaster and a bad god.

Because when you obsess about your body, the cult of the body, what happens? Maybe you're not. Teenagers in front of the mirror or adults or anyone. You only ever see the bits you don't like.

You never look good enough or fit enough. Maybe you get convinced that you're too fat when actually you're painfully thin. Maybe your body won't do what you want, so you give up and you pig out until you're sick.

[ 7 : 21 ] You don't want to look good enough or bad enough or you're too fat when you're too fat when you're too fat. I'm down the line for people who can do it and afford it. Maybe Botox or surgery will help you look younger or better if you can afford it. But in truth, you end up looking less human and botched.

In a culture of worshipping and serving our bodies, we can end up hating them and loathing them. You think, what is that in our world and for us?

Instead of gladly thanking God for this, a kind of foolish, darkened heart out of touch with reality-ness with this body of mine in our culture.

Paul's talking here about darkened hearts and idolatry and maybe in this series the cult of the body that traps us. Next here in these verses, the degrading of our bodies.

And that's verse 24, look down with me, where having turned from God, therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

[ 8 : 37 ] According to God, our bodies are things of such immense worth. And we're designed by God for sexual intimacy within a marriage.

Just one person, one other person who will see me and know me in this way, who's vowed before God, with my body I honour you. That's how it should be.

That's pure. But when with darkened hearts we turn from his ways, he gives us over in our desires to the degrading of our bodies, to dishonouring our bodies sexually, which is the world and the culture we're part of, is it not?

A world of multiple sexual encounters for some, sexting, a hook-up culture, and pornography everywhere, driving the internet and teaching our children.

Which is not happy sexual freedom, it isn't. But a terribly evil degrading of the human body. One user of Tinder, the pickup app, describes it as a meat market for singles.

[ 9 : 48 ] So little personal relationship, and no honouring of somebody made in God's image. But instead, treating others and their bodies as pieces of meat to pick up and use and discard.

Sometimes two people agree to do that today. Sometimes people, often young children or women, but not always, are pressured and forced into being degraded.

A kind of promise of emotional intimacy. And cruelly taken advantage of. And the truth is, when your body has been viewed and used time and again, and when you've viewed and used others' bodies time and again, the sense of being dirty and degraded is real.

It sticks to you. Some of us will know this. Very personally. Either from the past or from now.

And our neighbours know this. And our colleagues know this. And this degrading of our God-given bodies, it goes on in verse 26.

[10:58] Follow through with me. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.

Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. They are very controversial verses in our culture.

And even in parts of the church. But very clear. Paul is saying that there are natural sexual relations and unnatural ones.

That needs untangling a bit. We live in a world that often says the real authentic me is inside. It's what I feel inside that counts. And of course I should express that.

And so if as a man I feel sexually attracted to another man, if that's natural to me, it's fine, surely. But Paul here is talking about God's natural created order.

[12:05] The God who created the world and made our bodies and made us male and female. And in his goodness he designed us physically to be different from one another.

And our different sexual anatomy to fit together a man and a woman. To use our God-given bodies as he intends, that is what is natural and God-given and good.

But to abandon natural relations, for two women to lie together, for two men to have sex, these are shameful acts, the Bible says.

And on Romans 1 goes. Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind so that they do what ought not to be done.

They've become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, grief and malice. They are gossips, slanderers and so on.

[13:17] What a list that is. Think of the wickedness of physical violence or the evil of revenge porn or greedy appetites or envying other people's bodies or malicious body shaming and so on and so on.

It's saying here in the Bible that we live in a world shot through with personal experience of darkened hearts and degraded bodies. I find these verses in Romans 1 very raw and in your face and dark but they are true.

They describe reality all around us and for us personally. We have God-given created bodies. He's the artist, the sculptor. Like the most stunning picture hanging in the Fitzwilliam Museum, we've been devised, designed and produced by the divine artist. God's masterpiece are bodies. Yet now it is like the picture is scratched and torn, defaced, half-burned, and the frame is cracked and twisted.

[14:42] See how far we've fallen, darkened, and degraded. Do you know about this? Our kind of love-hate relationship with our bodies, the things we've seen with our eyes, stuff we've done with our body, things done to us, the guilt and the shame and the dirt that sticks.

There is a second angle though on life in our fallen bodies today, which I want to touch on as well this morning.

If Romans 1 shows us how we sin in and through these bodies of ours, in Romans chapter 8, forward a few pages, on page 1135, Paul broadens out to the wider effects of living in God's world today.

So first, Romans 1, we live in a world of darkened hearts and degraded bodies, a world, second, of disease, disability, decay, and death.

In Romans 8, verse 18, let me mention a couple of things from these verses. In Romans 8, verse 18, Paul writes, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[16:10] These present sufferings, he talks about, are all the troubles we experience today. Certainly persecution as Christian believers, that's part of it. Certainly the pain of disobedience, as I long to please God more and more, but fail so often.

But along with that, the present suffering in our bodies that comes from living in a world of decay and death. See, Paul goes on in verse 19, the creation, this creation, waits in eager anticipation for the children of God to be revealed.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

You see, at the beginning in the Garden of Eden, Adam turned from God in sin and God placed all of our created order under a curse. In the words of verse 20, creation was subjected to frustration. And verse 21, creation was placed in bondage to decay. It's talking about our world now, twisted out of joint, and thorns and thistles and earthquakes and famine all around us, the whole of creation blanketed in decay and death.

[ 17 : 44 ] And the point is that you and I are connected with this decaying creation in our fallen bodies in which we suffer. It's really striking when you read the Gospels how Jesus, in his life and ministry, encountered real life in the raw.

Men with leprosy and paralyzed legs or a shriveled hand. A centurion servant, ill and about to die. The only son of a widow, dead, being carried out to be buried.

Jairus' daughter, dying. A woman with 12 years of unstoppable menstrual bleeding. That is real life in our bodies in this fallen world.

And for us at St John's, the months or the weeks when our bodies are okay and mediumly healthy and we don't think about them much, that is a rare and special blessing.

Sometimes we bring bodily hurt on ourselves when we turn away from God's commands. If you sleep around, you may catch an STI. If you overeat or overdrink, you'll suffer in your body.

[ 19 : 01 ] If you fail to rest, your body will burn out. If you refuse to trust your God, anxiety, worry will get to you. So often though, the sufferings we endure in our body, it's just life now.

Some of us born with lifelong disabilities. Short-term infections and broken bones frustrate us, but they come and go.

Arthritis, asthma, diabetes, muscle fatigue, cancer, go on and on. Disease and disability can be so isolating, so wearing, so painful.

Certainly, medicine and medics can help and God can heal miraculously if he decides to and praise him when he does. But for both Christians and unbelievers, disease and disability are part of the right now sufferings of our bodies.

It's worth really underlining this, by the way. A while back, a little booklet, it's called Rhapsody of Realities, came through my door, which is a series of Bible readings from Believers Love World Cambridge.

[ 20 : 20 ] And it said on the front, I picked it up and read it, I chose to believe how Nina Miller overcame cancer through steadfast faith in the word. Quote, command any boisterous wind and wave that may be billowing against your life to cease.

Speak to diabetes to be healed. Tell that cancerous growth to dematerialise. Like Jesus, you can talk to anything and it'll obey you. It's just a monstrous, untrue lie, that.

And it's a massive cruelty to say that if you have enough faith, you can tell cancer to dematerialise and it will go. And if your cancer doesn't go, it's because you haven't got enough faith.

It's rotten, that. Now, for faithful Christian believers, in the words of verse 23, we groan. See that? We groan now as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. Disease, disability, and of course, along with that, decay and death.

[ 21 : 32 ] death. Some of us will die younger than we expect, out of the blue, an accident, a fatal disease. And for others, there's a slow downhillness, which is why those of us in the middle of our lives feel so uneasy some of the time.

You get more out of breath than you once did. You need glasses. Then your skin sags and you're more fragile and you can't remember so much and your prostate plays up and you need a stick to walk and then you can't climb the stairs anymore and you groan.

I read an article a while back in the paper by Janice Turner on old age. My father broke a hip on Sunday morning. He just tipped over lightly on a carpeted floor.

It didn't even hurt. I am reminded of how an overcooked chicken leg comes off the carcass. How fragile are the very old? Until something or other finally gets hold of your body and then you breathe your final breath and lie still.

And, says Ecclesiastes 12, the dust returns to the ground it came from and the spirit returns to God who gave it. And at that point we cry and we grieve because death is a terrible enemy and life in the body should not be like this.

[ 23 : 01 ] It shouldn't. And we're talking this morning about God and our bodies.

A biblical view, a true view that explains us. Do you not think the Bible speaks truth here in our experience? We are fearfully and wonderfully made. These bodies of ours are good, God-given gifts and yet at the very same time we're so far fallen.

Darkened hearts, degraded bodies, disease, disability, decay and death. Don't you feel that? In your own body? Sin and hurt and shame and memories and scars and weakness and pain. Your own personal history to this point in this God-given body of yours. We are not what we were made to be. We're paintings scratched and torn.

And the thing is there's nothing we can do ourselves to change. Self-help or surgery won't help in the long run. A new plan, a positive mental attitude will not change our bodies for good.

[ 24 : 23 ] By ourselves and left to ourselves we're lost. We're just lost. And we need a saviour. We need a powerful loving saviour who can shine light into the darkest of hearts.

and who can purify and cleanse our degraded bodies and who can somehow deal with disease and decay and death itself.

We need a saviour not a mental helper but an actual saviour for these sin-riddled fallen bodies of ours. If you like we need the artist to come and restore his handiwork to mend our scratches and tears and clean us up and reset our frames and restore us for glory.

And the Bible says, and many of us so wonderfully know, that that is what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. I didn't put them on the screen.

There are three verses at the bottom of the sheet there. Look. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. John 1.14 He became flesh.

[ 25 : 40 ] Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity because we are bodily people. Our saviour came to us and shared in our humanity.

God the Son, seeing our misery, took to himself a human body. He knows our sin and hurt and shame and memories and scars and weakness and pain.

And the reason he came into the world was to save us and restore us body and soul. He grew up, he healed many, he died and it says in 1 Peter 2 verse 24 he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.

And it's by his wounds in his flesh that you have been healed. He is the bodily saviour that you and I need for our sin and guilt ridden bodies.

Because now today as a person comes to the Lord Jesus Christ body and soul and as you place your faith in him, this risen saviour, you are to know that he died for you, he rose for you, he defeated death for you, he washes your degrading sins away, he washes your shame away, he redeems and saves you body and soul so that today you might belong to him with the Holy Spirit in you.

[ 27 : 20 ] and the Lord God promises to creatures with created yet fallen bodies that when you belong to Jesus Christ by faith, the day will come when having walked through this life groaning in your body, the day will come when you will stand before your heavenly father without blemish and free from accusation and you, body and soul, will be fully and finally restored forever.

We need a saviour. We need someone to save us in our bodies, to save us body and soul and we have that saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And let me lead us in a prayer. Let's pray together. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity.

Our father, you see us and know us, we your creatures, every thought and word and deed. Of us, your creatures who have turned from you.

Our thinking is not straight by nature, our hearts are darkened. we bear sin and guilt and shame, our bodies degrade dead and disobedient.

[ 28 : 54 ] We suffer and die, yet you are our loving saviour and restorer. our Thank you that since we have flesh and blood, your son too shared in our humanity, so that by his death he might overcome the evil one and break the power of death and give us life eternal in our bodies.

Help us this morning to see ourselves rightly. Help us this morning to place our trust in you, our loving saviour, in Jesus' name.

Amen.