

A Reaction to Rev. Jon Scharf's

I Believe that I am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: The Pastor Cares for his Body

We know the list well. When Paul spells out for Timothy the qualifications—the attitudes, aptitudes, and characteristics—of one who is qualified to serve in the public ministry, we naturally pay attention. Even now you can hear the words: *above reproach, husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable*, and so on. Perhaps it brings a sigh of relief to remember, however, what isn't listed. Qualifications based on height, weight, blood pressure, and BMI are not, in fact, spelled out. Personally, I am thankful for that! And yet, as pastors, we also recognize that there most certainly is a physical component—not only in being a Christian, but also in serving as a Pastor and carrying out the ministry charged to us.

With that in mind, we are grateful for Pastor Scharf's work navigating the topic of Physical Wellness and the pastor's responsibility for and privilege of caring for his body.

In his opening words, Pastor Scharf notes that we tend to downplay the importance of our bodies. I would agree. All too often, we take the gift of our body for granted. Throughout our life, we frequently just expect our body to be functioning and up for the tasks that we undertake. When we do pause to give our body consideration, it's likely because our body has been acting up and letting us down – whether due to illness, age, or a failed attempt to push it beyond capability.

Unfortunately, at times our body simply is not recognized as the tremendous gift it is and maintained as the blessing it is. For this reason, I think Pastor Scharf's essay serves a valuable purpose. On p. 1 he remarks: "What I'm about to present is nothing new." Perhaps that's true for some. For others, however, there may be some new insights taken home. For all, however, the value of this essay is unquestionable. Why? Because the frequent elephant in the room of physical self-care has been acknowledged and treated in a balanced way. And that's a good thing.

First, a comment on structure. I greatly appreciated the way that the topic was handled. I'm glad the urge was resisted to jump in and treat this topic with a quick "how-to" on physical fitness. I found it refreshing to view the matter first from the three articles of the Creed. The Creed and Luther's explanation provide an appropriate framework for delving into exactly what we do believe regarding our physical body – where it came from, how it has been redeemed, and how we are blessed to utilize it. Perhaps this approach will keep the topic and contents of this essay in our mind every time we confess the Creed or have the privilege to teach it to others.

While there is much to be considered throughout the essay, here are a few highlights taken from our essayist's work:

1st Article Comments

This section reminded me of how often there is a disconnect between my 1st Article confession and my actions. While we readily admit that our body is a gift of God, how often do we neglect it—often with a purportedly pious pretext?! The quotation of Herbert Chilstrom's comment "that many pastors are so neglectful of the care of their bodies that they cannot possibly fulfill the demands of their calling" (p.4) is telling. The irony, of course, is that the first line of defense for the one looking

to justify a lack of physical self-care is likely hiding behind the pretext that the more important work of ministry must get done. In doing so, we have pitted two things—physical well-being and ministry—against each other in an unhealthy way. While urging balance, Pastor Scharf walks us to the truth: “Doing God’s work includes care for our bodies.” (p.11)

2nd Article Comments

Christology is frequently discussed in our circles and rightfully so! We know what’s at stake when it comes to our salvation. The importance of confessing the two natures of Jesus Christ—true God from eternity and also true man—is paramount in knowing why he is our Savior. We treasure that truth as we see him in Scripture serve as our perfect substitute and give his life as the perfect atoning sacrifice.

The fact that Christ took on human flesh is not only vitally important for our eternal salvation. It also reminds us of the value given to our physical bodies. For it is not only our soul that has been redeemed; rather, it is our soul and body! This informs our view when considering physical wellness. As Pastor Scharf writes: “The body is good ... fearfully and wonderfully made, and shockingly redeemed.” (p. 15) Later he writes: This redemption of our bodies, then, is motivation for our care for our bodies....We have our bodies so that we can give glory to God, so that we can do his work, so that we can enjoy his creation....” (p. 16)

3rd Article Comments

Our essayist notes: “As we proceed to the third person of the Trinity and consider what He says about our bodies, we highlight three truths. One, our bodies are his temple. He sanctifies these bodies. Two, God has placed us here in community with other bodies and souls in the Holy Christian Church. And three, thanks to the work of the Spirit, these bodies will be raised.” (p. 17). While all three truths stand and are treasured, I appreciated the attention given to the role that we, along with our redeemed bodies, are placed in contexts within the Holy Christian Church to serve God and one another. As we care for our bodies, we give glory to God who created us. As we care for our bodies, we also see the value in being allowed to receive support from our Christian community as well as being able to use our bodies in lives of service.

A Reasoned Response

Having set the stage by walking us through the truths of the Creed, Pastor Scharf laid the all-important groundwork for his concluding section of encouragements and applications as the pastor cares for his body. Summarizing a paragraph on p. 21, it’s only because of what we know and treasure about our triune God that we are able to tackle the topic of properly approaching our physical wellness with a renewed zeal.

The balance and pragmatism provided by our essayist, along with the personal anecdotes, made for an enjoyable read. By tackling the broad, but important, areas of food, exercise, rest, and support, he allowed for the opportunity to encourage real, if even only incremental, change without binding consciences by creating man-made laws. It’s not lost on me that the next agenda item on this Symposium schedule is the afterglow—in which food and drink will be prevalent. Of course, the fact

that you did make us do (attempt?) push-up has given us the right to indulge, no? Yes, even in this the balancing act continues – cognizant of the pitfalls of legalism and wantonness that exist on opposite sides of the discussion of physical well-being.

By working toward physical wellness, we are not chasing the Fountain of Youth. Rather, knowing our eternity is secure, we strive for sanctified maintenance of one of our greatest blessings and resources for carrying out gospel ministry.

Once again, thank you, Pastor Scharf, for both the structure and content of your essay. It provided a wonderful reminder that any discussion of pastoral wellness simply must include the physical component. We are, indeed, fearfully and wonderfully made. Let us, then, care for our bodies!

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Potential Questions for Further Discussion:

1. As the primary audience of this Symposium are those who serve or will serve in the pastoral ministry, let's shift the attention to our sermons. From the pulpit, we strive to preach specific law—at times pointing out sins that clearly work against physical wellness. We might speak against drunkenness or drug use. We might talk about suicide and the unfortunate truth that assisted suicide and sanctity of life issues have become pervasive. But what of poor diet, non-existent exercise habits, or debilitating lack of rest? Would you suggest those topics—or others related to physical wellness—be addressed more often? Do you have any advice on how to do so appropriately?
2. As the chairman of the WLS Governing Board (How's that for putting you on the spot?), do you have any suggestions on how the Seminary can better assist future pastors in navigating this physical wellness balance from early on?
3. I believe the only time "stewardship" came up in the essay was in the context of the comical "Polar Pop" anecdote. That seems, however, to be the right term to use when addressing the Christian's physical well-being. Our physical body is one of the many gifts given to us for service in God's kingdom. And with all gifts, our role as stewards is key. For years, the average stewardship program has focused on the areas of Time, Talents, and Treasures. Would you suggest adding a "T" for Temple (the Holy Spirit's temple—our body) and routinely discussing physical stewardship with our congregations?
4. Do you have any advice on how pastors can engage their church leadership on the topic of physical wellness? What would be some key talking points?