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THE IMPLICATIONS OF AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY
OF THE BODY FOR CHRISTOCENTRIC
SPIRITUAL FORMATION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
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May 2018

APPROVAL SHEET

THE IMPLICATIONS OF AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY
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I dedicate this thesis to the Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from him, nothing is possible; and to my loving husband, Coleman, who has provided endless encouragement throughout the course of this work.

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PREFACE

This project would not have been possible without the help of several influential figures in my life. I am thankful for the support and guidance from my supervisor, Dr. Danny Bowen, throughout the course of this project. I would like to thank Dr. Gregg Allison and Michael Graham for their encouragement and input; also Dr. Timothy Paul Jones and Dr. Michael Wilder for their constant support during my time at Southern Seminary.

My family also played an instrumental role throughout my studies and in the completion of this project. I am grateful for the love and encouragement that I have received from my husband, Coleman; and our dearest daughter, Colette, for being more of an encouragement than she realizes. My father, Lawnie, played an inspirational role in my studies, as his love of learning and emphasis on the importance of higher education equipped me to be where I am today. I must also recognize the influence of my late mother, Maryann; her love continues to be the “wind in my sails” as I complete my studies. My brother, Chase, in-laws—Mike, Jayne, Cameron, and Jordan—and extended family have also been vital sources of ongoing encouragement for which I am forever grateful. Most importantly, I am thankful for my Savior, Jesus Christ, and the opportunity to experience his grace even more deeply throughout my time at Southern Seminary. Only by his grace am I able to be a part of this work, which is for his glory.

Alexandria Ford

Dallas, Texas

May 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Scripture reveals that God has created human beings as an embodied people; however, the relationship between the embodiment of believers and their spiritual development is not often addressed within the Western church context, possibly due to the erroneous belief that this type of compartmentalization is consistent with Scripture. Such misguided beliefs about human embodiment are not based in Scripture, but are in fact more closely aligned with a dualistic, compartmentalized understanding of the human person. Simon Chan explains, “Both body and mind have a part to play in spiritual development and must not be neglected in favor of the spirit.”¹ Scripture teaches that God created human beings as holistic and integrated, and they glorify their Creator as embodied people (Gen 2:7). This research study examines select Old and New Testament passages to discern if a relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation exists, and if so, in what ways should a believer’s embodiment impact models of Christian spiritual formation. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul reveals the existence of a relationship between human embodiment and the sanctification of believers, as he prays that the Thessalonians would be sanctified completely and that the entirety of their being would be kept blameless at the coming of Christ. This thesis argues that human embodiment and Christocentricity are both necessary components of a biblically and theologically sound model of Christian spiritual formation.

¹Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 59.

Introduction to the Research Problem

For a proper understanding of human embodiment to be developed, Scripture must provide the foundation for understanding. The Old Testament points to the importance of the physical body: God created human beings as embodied people, demonstrated in Genesis 2:7. Humanity is created in God’s image—traditionally called the *imago Dei*—where man’s body is formed from the dust of the ground and God breathes the breath of life into him; woman is formed from the rib of Adam (Gen 2:21-23). These verses reveal how God created human beings in an integrated manner, with both a material body and an immaterial spirit, which is used interchangeably with the word “soul” throughout Scripture.² Diane Chandler describes the creation of Adam and Eve in this way:

The formation of Adam and Eve, created in the image of God as integrated beings, entails a physical body, spiritual endowment, emotions, relational capacity, intelligence, vocational propensity for work, capability for physical health and wellness, and the ability to be stewards of themselves, God’s creation and God-given resources. God did not assemble humankind in piecemeal fashion.³

Human embodiment is an indispensable aspect of being created in God’s image.

However, a disjointed view of the self that elevates the spiritual at the expense of the physical tends to be a common viewpoint among believers.⁴ Gregg Allison states, “[E]vangelicals at best express an ambivalence toward the human body, and at worst manifest a disregard or contempt for it.”⁵

²John R. W. Stott, *The Message of First and Second Thessalonians*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 132.

³Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wellness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 31.

⁴For a thorough discussion on the potential influence of Gnosticism and other philosophies on a Christian understanding of human embodiment, see Elizabeth L. Hall, “What Are Bodies for? An Integrative Examination of Embodiment,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 39, no. 2 (2010): 159-76.

⁵Gregg R. Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 4.

Additionally, there are “predominant ways in which the body has been misunderstood: at times rejected and despised, at times over-glorified,” according to Mary Timothy Prokes.⁶ At times, it appears that there is little importance in how the body is regarded or treated within the Western church context, which may be informed by a belief that the body is wasting away or that care for the body could result in idolatry. Allison explains, “Many people, often due to tragic experiences with the body (e.g., physical/sexual abuse), abhor their body, and many Christians, due to either poor or non-existent teaching on human embodiment, consider their body to be, at best, a hindrance to spiritual maturity, and, at worst, inherently evil or the ultimate source of sin.”⁷ It is also a possibility for believers to think that they need to be solely concerned with nourishing and caring for themselves and others spiritually, not physically. Yet, a holistic view of the human person, in direct contrast with ambivalence toward the physical body, is necessary.

Further describing the importance of a holistic view of the human person versus disjointed compartmentalization, Chan notes,

Genuine Christian asceticism never polarizes body and spirit. Voices that accuse the ancients of emphasizing the spirit to the neglect of the body usually come from moderns who themselves lack the spiritual and mental discipline to resist overindulging themselves. God can and does work through the body and mind to the heart. Communion with God is not merely a matter of spirit with Spirit. Body and mind can become avenues of grace.⁸

Scripture teaches that the human person is created in the *imago Dei*, which is a crucial aspect in the study of human embodiment. Wisdom literature, such as the Psalms, points to the significance of the physical body with passages that speak to God’s hand in its formation. For example, Psalm 139:13–14 demonstrates how God intricately forms the human person, who is fearfully and wonderfully made. The Psalmist further describes the

⁶Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 57.

⁷Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment,” 5.

⁸Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 59.

creation of human beings when he states, “Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (Ps 100:3).

God created man and woman in an embodied state and also sent his son, Jesus Christ, to earth in a physical body. The New Testament reveals that Jesus was incarnate—he came to earth in bodily form according to the Father’s divine plan (John 1:14).⁹ The Gospels reveal that Jesus cared for the physical bodies of others in how he healed the sick and fed the hungry (e.g., Matt 14:13-21). Paul also speaks to the importance of the physical body in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, where he explains that a believer’s body is sacred and a temple of the Holy Spirit. He appeals to the Corinthians to glorify God with their bodies, which includes both how they care for themselves on a practical level (1 Cor 6:20). Additionally, Romans 12:1–2 has numerous implications for the whole person as created by God. Paul petitions the Romans to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, as a means of spiritual worship (v. 1). Paul summons them to be transformed in the renewing of their minds and not to be held captive by the world (v. 2).

Scripture clearly demonstrates that believers should both think and act biblically regarding their minds and bodies rather than falling into worldly patterns of thinking or behaving (Rom 12:1-2). An evangelical theology of the body recognizes the importance of the physical body based on the *imago Dei* and considers each dimension of the person as important and valuable. Therefore, it is vital that one consider the importance of the body in relation to spiritual development.

Significance of the Research

While several Christian spiritual formation approaches exist, many neglect the relevance of human embodiment to the Christian life and how it relates to the spiritual

⁹Chap. 4 provides a fuller discussion on the incarnation of Christ.

development of believers.¹⁰ Dallas Willard describes how current views regarding salvation are missing an “appropriate recognition of the body and of its implications for theology.”¹¹ Fortunately, literature that advocates for a holistic view of human beings and recognizes the relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation has increased as of late. For example, Mark Maddix describes how a holistic view of the human person is integral to spiritual formation and describes how believers will cease to grow spiritually if any aspects of the human person are ignored or neglected.¹² He explains, “Spiritual formation includes the individual aspects of each person, but it is impossible to separate one aspect from the other.”¹³ Like Maddix, literature from Chandler, Willard, Kenneth Boa, and others make note of the relationship between spiritual formation and human embodiment, which will be discussed further in this thesis.¹⁴ However, these contributions demonstrate opportunities for further development, including expanded study on the relationship between the physical body and spiritual

¹⁰Works discussed within the context of this thesis are Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2001; Chan, *Spiritual Theology*; Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*; Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper Pub., 1998); E. Dee Freeborn et al., *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press), 1994; M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2016; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2014); and Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991). For additional discussion on how the body is often neglected in spiritual formation approaches, see Mark A. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep, Jr. and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Pub., 2010), 266.

¹¹Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 29.

¹²Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 264-65

¹³Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 264.

¹⁴Chap. 2 provides a full review of the literature, discussing these works and others. Literature that notes the relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation include Boa, *Conformed to His Image*; Chan, *Spiritual Theology*; Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*; Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*; Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation”; Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

formation and deeper insight into the need for holistic spiritual formation approaches to be Christocentric.¹⁵ Therefore, an opportunity in the literature exists for a Christocentric spiritual formation approach that provides further reflection on human embodiment.

Research Questions

This thesis argues that human embodiment and Christocentricity are both necessary components in Christian spiritual formation. In order to support this thesis, the following research questions informed this study:

1. What is a biblical framework for developing a theology of human embodiment?
2. What importance does human embodiment play in Christian spiritual formation?
3. What elements should be included in a Christocentric spiritual formation model that adequately address the soul and body?

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to discover if a relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation exists according to Scripture and if so, how it relates to the role of the physical body within spiritual formation. In order to answer the research questions that have informed this study, the following methodology is employed. This thesis reviews relevant spiritual formation literature and health and wellness literature that is currently being utilized within the Western church context in order to demonstrate the dichotomy that exists within the literature base. These sources demonstrate a trend towards strictly focusing on the soul, while neglecting the body, or primarily focusing on the physical body, while integrating little, if any, biblical and theological foundations. This study also addresses the tendency within the Western church to compartmentalize

¹⁵Notably, Chandler's Christian spiritual formation model in *Christian Spiritual Formation* includes physical health and wellness, but positions the *imago Dei* at the center. Based on Scripture, this thesis argues that Christ, himself, should be the center of Christian formation models, as believers are being conformed to his image and likeness (Rom 8:29).

soul and body rather than considering human beings from a holistic perspective, as created in the *imago Dei*. This faulty doctrine bears a resemblance to platonic philosophy; therefore, a discussion on relevant socio-historical points explores how the church arrived at a compartmentalized view of the human person. Additionally, a brief review of select passages from Scripture will demonstrate the significance of human embodiment and how it relates to the sanctification of believers. Lastly, this thesis discusses the implications of human embodiment for spiritual formation and contains an example of a spiritual formation model that is Christocentric and thoughtfully considers the role of the physical body.

The following outline provides a brief overview of each chapter: Chapter 2 reviews the current precedent literature related to Christian spiritual formation and health and wellness literature written from a Christian perspective. This chapter demonstrates a need within the literature for a Christian spiritual formation approach that further develops an understanding of the relationship between human embodiment and spiritual development.

Chapter 3 provides initial research into a socio-historical overview on philosophies that involve the material and immaterial dimensions of human beings, including Platonic dualism, early Greek philosophies related to dualism, and Gnosticism. This chapter demonstrates the similarities between radical dualism and how the Western church often views human embodiment, which involves regarding the soul and body as separate entities rather than considering human beings from an integrated perspective. Scripture is used as a corrective lens through which a proper understanding of human embodiment can be developed.

Chapter 4 examines select Old and New Testament passages related to human embodiment in order to discover the significance of the physical body, as well as if and how it relates to the spiritual formation of believers. This chapter discerns if discrepancies between a biblical view of the body and a compartmentalized, radical

understanding of the body exist within the Western church according to the observations from Scripture. This assessment provides a basis from which a biblical understanding of human embodiment can be developed and a foundation for how the physical body relates to spiritual formation.

Chapter 5 synthesizes the research in order to demonstrate how human embodiment relates to spiritual formation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide implications for Christian spiritual formation from a biblical understanding of human embodiment. Additionally, this chapter proposes an example of a Christocentric model of spiritual formation, informed by a biblical understanding of human embodiment, which describes how formation occurs within the spiritual, physical, relational, mental, and emotional dimensions. This chapter describes how the implications, as well as this study, contribute to the precedent literature. Application of the research and ideas for further research are provided in this chapter.

Delimitations of the Study

An in-depth study of all philosophies that address the material and immaterial parts of human beings is beyond the scope of this thesis. This study includes brief insight into Platonic dualism, early Greek philosophy, and Gnosticism, specifically focusing on how they regard the material and immaterial dimensions of the human person. This socio-historical background provides a foundation for understanding the tendency towards compartmentalization of the human person within the current Western church context.

A comprehensive treatment of Scripture is also beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, select passages are assessed to discover what the Bible says about human embodiment in order to discuss overall points and themes relevant to the subject matter at hand.

A full analysis of all Christian spiritual formation literature and all that has been written on health and wellness from a Christian perspective is not addressed within

this study. Instead, this study analyzes key Christian spiritual formation texts and assesses Christian health and wellness literature that is currently being utilized in the Western church context. This analysis reveals an existing opportunity within the literature base to further demonstrate the relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation; in turn, this assists in developing a Christocentric model of spiritual formation that considers the role of human embodiment in the spiritual development of believers. Finally, this study will be limited to resources that have been published in the English language.

Limitation of Generalization of Research Findings

Part of this study seeks to examine in what ways, if any, the Western church has been influenced by philosophies that involve the compartmentalization or a dualistic understanding of the human person. As a result, application of the findings may not be generalizable beyond the current Western church context.

Terminology and Definitions

The following definitions explain terms utilized consistently throughout this study:

Christian spiritual formation. Christian spiritual formation is the process by which believers are transformed into Christlikeness through the process of sanctification for the glory of God. Christian spiritual formation involves the dimensions in which believers are formed and the overall process by which spiritual development occurs. Donald Whitney explains how believers are to grow towards Christlikeness through the practice of the spiritual disciplines: “God will grant Christlikeness to us when Jesus returns, until then He intends for us to grow toward it.”¹⁶ This is a foundational aspect of

¹⁶Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 2.

spiritual formation. Many models of Christian spiritual formation exist, which emphasize different components involved in spiritual development.¹⁷

Human embodiment. God has created human beings with an immaterial soul and a material physical body. Allison states, “The human body is an essential aspect of human beings during their earthly existence and, following Christ’s return and the resurrection of their body, in the age to come.”¹⁸ God’s design is inherent in how he created human beings as embodied.

Imago Dei. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* describes how human beings are created in the image of God according to Genesis 1:26. As a result of being created in the *imago Dei*, human beings are image-bearers of God in the world. The *imago Dei* has been understood in various ways as revealed by substantive and relational models. Substantive models focus on how the *imago Dei* relates to attributes while functional models describe how the image of God relates to a particular activity.¹⁹ Additionally, relational models consider how the image of God is inherent in the relational capacity between man and woman while eclectic models “find the others to be reductionistic and considers the image to be people themselves in the totality of their being and activities.”²⁰

Physical health. Physical health is an aspect of overall fitness and wellness, and includes the elements of “(1) nutrition, (2) physical exercise, (3) sleep, (4) stress,

¹⁷Seminal works in the areas of spiritual formation are Boa, *Conformed to His Image*; Chan, *Spiritual Theology*; Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*; Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*; E. Dee Freeborn et al., *The Upward Call*; Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*; Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*; and Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*.

¹⁸Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment,” 5.

¹⁹Gregg R. Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*, s.v. “image of God (*imago Dei*)” (Grand Rapids: Baker Pub., 2016), 107.

²⁰Allison, *Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 107.

rest, and leisure, and (5) sexual purity,” or responsible sexual expression.²¹ Gender self-acceptance, as it relates to a person’s biologically determined sex of male or female, is also an aspect of physical health. The most recent United States Surgeon General’s report on physical activity and health describes how “physical activity is only one of many everyday behaviors that affects health. In particular, nutritional habits are linked to some of the same aspects of health as physical activity, and the two may be related lifestyle characteristics.”²² Physical health plays an integral part in the life of human beings and can either enable or disable one from actively participating in the activities of life.

Theology of the body. A theology of the body is the study of human embodiment from a biblical-theological perspective.²³ An evangelical theology of the body refers to a biblically-informed understanding of the physical body as it relates to the *imago Dei*. A theology of the body considers the whole person, as God has created human beings in soul and body, and regards each dimension of the person as important and valuable. A biblical foundation is critical in developing a correct understanding of the human person because “the realities of human existence, which we have seen are difficult to encompass in non-theological anthropologies, are solved in Scripture.”²⁴

Wellness. Wellness is a state of wellbeing in all areas of life and is characterized by flourishing. A secular understanding of flourishing is often based on success of achievement. While a biblical understanding of flourishing can include these

²¹Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 181.

²²David Satcher and Philip R. Lee, “Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General Executive Summary,” Cdc.gov, 1996, accessed January 12, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/pdf/execsumm.pdf>, 10.

²³For a more detailed definition of human embodiment and theology of the human body, see Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment.”

²⁴J. P. Moreland and David M. Ciochi, eds., *Christian Perspectives on Being Human: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Integration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 21.

aspects, it is ultimately dependent on being united with Christ. Flourishing is a whole person concept, which can only be realized in Christ, partially in this life and fully in the next. Additionally, wellness is not contingent upon physical health “when considered from the perspective of each of the other domains of life,” which implies that wellness “can be much more fulfilling and deeply satisfying.”²⁵ A dynamic concept of wellness involves a holistic, multifaceted understanding of the human person involving the dimensions of body and soul.²⁶ Wellness involves the spiritual, physical, relational, mental, and emotional aspects of the human person. Laura Hendrickson notes, “It is important to realize that every emotion involves a complex interaction between body and soul. For example, the Bible teaches that improving the way that our body feels can change our emotions for the better.”²⁷ Therefore, wellness involves the stewardship and care of all aspects of the human person, recognizing that it is God who has sovereignly created humanity in particular ways for a specific purpose.

Research Assumptions

This thesis assumes that the Bible is authoritative and provides the foundation for which the research is based. Additionally, this thesis presupposes that the Bible is sufficient for developing an evangelical theology of the body and is capable of providing the foundation for a Christocentric model of spiritual formation that considers the whole person as created by God.

²⁵John Dunlop, *Wellness for the Glory of God: Living Well after 40 with Joy and Contentment in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 47.

²⁶For more information on how material and immaterial aspects of man have been addressed in monism and dualism, see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism–Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 9, 98.

²⁷Laura Hendrickson, “The Complex Mind/Body Connection,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 2013), 415.

Conclusion

This thesis argues that human embodiment and Christocentricity are both necessary components of a biblically and theologically sound model of Christian spiritual formation. This chapter identifies the research problem and outlines the research methodology that is employed by this study. This chapter discusses the significance and relevance of the research; it also lists the delimitations, defines terminology, and outlines the assumptions of the study. Lastly, this chapter reveals the purpose and relevance of the research.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to present the precedent literature on Christian spiritual formation, as well as health and wellness that is written from a Christian perspective and is currently being utilized by the church. The review of the literature provides the impetus behind the research study. This chapter demonstrates the opportunity within the literature base for a spiritual formation model that is Christocentric in its approach and considers the implications of human embodiment, as related to the *imago Dei*. Current Christian spiritual formation literature appears to be moving towards a holistic, integrative understanding of the human person that considers both body and soul in the formation process; however, contributions are still needed in this area. Several sources mention how the physical body has historically been neglected within spiritual formation approaches. For instance, Mark Maddix explains, “Often, approaches to spiritual formation negate the importance of the human aspects of spiritual formation. Effective spiritual formation requires the development of all aspects of the human person.”¹ Presumably therefore, according to Maddix, human embodiment is a significant component in spiritual formation and there is need for further contribution to the literature in this area.

M. Elizabeth Hall and Erik Thoennes speak to the significance of human embodiment as they discuss how “certain aspects of our culture and theological history

¹Mark A. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep, Jr. and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Pub., 2010), 266.

have made our experience of embodiment a pressing concern. Radical mind-body dualism has plagued Christian theology since the first century.”² In the Western church, it appears that the spiritual state of a person is often elevated at the expense of the physical body under the false pretense that this is a biblically-informed view; Hall and Thoennes suggest this by referencing the influence of radical dualism, which is a philosophical concept that describes an extreme separation of the mind and matter, or physical body.³

Yet, Scripture demonstrates that God has created human beings in a holistic manner, which stands in contrast to a dualistic, compartmentalized understanding of humanity.⁴ The doctrine of the *imago Dei* provides a necessary corrective. Referencing Genesis 1:26-27, Wyndy Reuschling states,

This original depiction of the source and purpose of our humanity offers us important insights into what it means to be human and made in the image of God. The first is that our creaturely, embodied existence as male and female is the creation and gift of God. Contrary to many Western philosophical narratives, passed along from Plato and Aristotle (and unfortunately appropriated by some Western theological traditions), our entire existence—male and female, with flesh and bone, minds, spirits, and creative capacities, all that makes us who we are—is central to our humanity.⁵

Human embodiment is a foundational aspect of being created in the image of God, as Reuschling describes. Wayne Grudem warns, “We must not fall into the error of thinking

²M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall and Erik Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies: Implications of the Incarnation for Embodiment and Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 36, no. 1 (October 2006), 30.

³Chap. 3 provides a fuller discussion on dualism.

⁴For a more in-depth discussion regarding the understanding of man, see John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism–Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 9, 98. Overall, this text focuses on the historical understanding of dualism (soul and body) from a Christian perspective. For the purposes of how the physical body relates to Christian formation, it is helpful to assume a dichotomous view. A thorough analysis of anthropological views is outside the scope of this paper. For additional perspective regarding the nature of man, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 472–88.

⁵Jeannine K. Brown, Carla M. Dahl, and Wyndy C. Reuschling, *Becoming Whole and Holy: An Integrative Conversation about Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 112-13.

that nonmaterial existence is somehow a better form of existence for creatures: when God made us as the pinnacle of his creation, he gave us physical bodies.”⁶ Grudem argues that the material and immaterial existence of human beings should not be separated or viewed hierarchically. According to Albert Meiburg, a compartmentalized understanding of human beings—where body and soul are separated—is informed by an erroneous view that the physical body is evil. Meiburg explains, “From earliest Christian history there have been some who emphasized the difference between body and spirit The assumption that matter is evil lies at the heart of all efforts to separate the body and spirit.”⁷

It is necessary initially to review Christian spiritual formation literature in order to assess current models and approaches. This assessment demonstrates how few sources within the literature base integrate human embodiment into their approaches. Other sources related to spiritual formation, such as spiritual disciplines literature, tend to be limited in how they integrate human embodiment and usually only include practices such as fasting or certain elements of stewardship, as it relates to the physical body. Lastly, this study assesses Christian health and wellness literature that is currently being utilized by the church; these sources generally address the physical body as their primary focus. Christian health and wellness literature often integrates general spiritual principles, but this assessment reveals that biblical and theological truths are often underdeveloped.

Within a Western Christian context, the immaterial aspect of human beings—or soul—tends to be of primary focus, as a compartmentalized approach to addressing soul and body is often employed, sometimes unknowingly.⁸ However,

⁶Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 613.

⁷Albert L. Meiburg, *Sound Body/Sound Mind* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 39.

⁸Hall and Thoennes argue that the influence of radical dualism has strongly affected current theological understanding of the body and suggest that looking to Jesus is the answer to addressing this

observations from the field of neuroscience have demonstrated the integrative nature of the soul and body, which is an area of study that is continuing to expand.⁹ Curt

Thompson states,

As Christians, we sometimes dismiss our physical experience as inferior to the abstract, ethereal part of our consciousness where we ‘imagine’ or ‘think about’ spiritual matters. Yet Paul describes our bodies as the temples of the Holy Spirit, so clearly they’re involved in our deepest spiritual experiences. In fact, in order to love God with your mind, you must love him with your body. If you are not paying attention to what your body . . . is telling you, it will be difficult to love God with your mind because you will be disconnected from it. It is true that many experiences feel as if they don’t necessarily require the presence of your physical self . . . but if you don’t have a brain, or by extension, a body that it senses, you don’t have an experience.¹⁰

Scientific observations from the study of neuroscience confirm truths found in Scripture regarding the holistic nature of the human person in soul and body and how the physical body is involved in the spiritual development of believers.¹¹ In this chapter, the review of

fragmented view. For further discussion, see Hall and Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies,” 30.

⁹For additional resources on Christian neuroscience and related study, see Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Thomas M. Crisp, Steven L. Porter, and Gregg A. Ten Elshof, eds., *Neuroscience and the Soul: The Human Person in Philosophy, Science, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2016); Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Joel B. Green and Stuart L. Palmer, eds., *In Search of the Soul: Four Views of the Mind-Body Problem* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Richard Moll, *What Your Body Knows About God: How We are Designed to Connect, Serve, and Thrive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014); Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices that Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010).

¹⁰Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 29.

¹¹Brown and Strawn address the relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation: “Science suggests that functions of the brain and body in collaboration with social experience, rather than a disembodied soul, provide the physical basis for the mental capacities, interpersonal relations, and religious experiences of human beings. The realization that human beings are wholly physical, but with unique mental, relational, and spiritual capacities, challenges traditional views of Christian life as defined by care of souls, a view that leads to inwardness and individuality. Psychology and neuroscience suggest the importance of developmental oneness, attachment, imitation, and stories as tools in spiritual formation. Accordingly, the idea that care of embodied persons should be fundamentally social and communal sets new priorities for encouraging spiritual growth and building congregations.” Brown and Strawn, *Physical Nature of Christian Life*, i.

the literature demonstrates a vital need for Christian spiritual formation literature that further develops an understanding of how human embodiment relates to the spiritual development of believers. Such literature would in turn benefit the church by enabling believers to experience a truly holistic approach to spiritual formation that is based on a biblically-informed understanding of human embodiment and how it relates to spiritual development.

Christian Spiritual Formation

Christian spiritual formation encompasses how believers mature and are spiritually formed throughout their lifespan as they are transformed into Christlikeness. Ronald Habermas states, “The objective of every believer’s life and ministry is holistic, biblical restoration. We share the Trinity’s highest aspiration for people to be totally whole and for Christ-followers to be Christlike.”¹² As Habermas explains, wholeness is a means of Christlikeness. Evan Howard provides a thorough discussion on matters related to Christian spirituality, including Christian formation, education, spiritual development, and other topics; he describes spiritual formation as “a rather general term referring to all attempts, means, instructions, and disciplines intended toward deepening of faith and furtherance of spiritual growth.”¹³ Spiritual formation involves the process of spiritual development, as well as the dimensions in which believers are spiritually formed.

Christian Spiritual Formation and the Physical Body

Christian spiritual formation literature varies in how it addresses human embodiment—if it considers the concept at all. Some approaches recognize that human

¹²Ronald T. Habermas, *Introduction to Christian Education and Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 60.

¹³Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 23.

embodiment relates to spiritual development while others do not. These variances have the potential to be problematic and confusing as they may not adequately provide believers with an understanding of Christian spiritual formation that considers the whole person. Hall and Thoennes describe how this lack of clarity leads to practical questions: “How should we as Christians understand our embodied experiences? What is a right relationship with our bodies?”¹⁴ They argue that these important questions must be answered from a biblical understanding of humanity as embodied people, which is accomplished by looking to Jesus.

Additionally, in his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines* Dallas Willard explains,

Spirituality in human beings is not an extra or ‘superior’ mode of existence. It’s not a hidden stream of separate reality, a separate life running parallel to our bodily existence. It does not consist of special ‘inward’ acts even though it has an inner aspect. It is, rather, a relationship of our embodied selves to God that has the natural and irrepressible effect of making us alive to the Kingdom of God—here and now in the material world.¹⁵

Willard proposes that the embodiment of human beings enables them to be truly alive and in relationship with God. He states, “The human body *is* the focal point of human existence. Jesus had one. We have one. Without the body in its proper place, the pieces of the puzzle of new life in Christ do not realistically fit together, and the idea of really following him and becoming like him remains a practical impossibility.”¹⁶ Willard emphasizes the significance of the physical body, yet still infers that humanity can somehow be removed from their bodies as opposed to emphasizing that human beings exist as an embodied people. He describes how the body enables human beings to follow Jesus and be transformed into his image and likeness, which would be impossible without

¹⁴Hall and Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies,” 30.

¹⁵Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 31.

¹⁶Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 30.

the reality of being an embodied people. Willard argues that “the vitality and power of Christianity is lost when we fail to integrate our bodies into its practice by intelligent, conscious choice and steadfast intent. It is with our *bodies* that we receive the new life that comes as we enter his kingdom.”¹⁷ Willard suggests the significance of human embodiment in how God has created his people with the goal of following Christ and being transformed into his image. Therefore, Willard infers that believers are to glorify God with the whole self since God has created his people as embodied beings.

Spiritual development relates to human embodiment and the capacity for relationships with God and others, as Maddix explains. He states, “God’s intention for spiritual development is to be intertwined with the understanding and care of self, our relationship with God, and one another. When we live in this reality, we become more fully human and bear the image of the Triune God.”¹⁸ He argues that spiritual development relates to how believers understand and demonstrate care for themselves, which involves stewardship. Maddix’s discussion infers that an inaccurate understanding of the body according to Scripture or neglecting to care for oneself will have a negative impact on overall formation and spiritual growth. Focusing strictly on spiritual development without considering the body neglects a fundamental reality of human nature, as Maddix suggests.¹⁹

In his book *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation* Evan Howard describes embodiment as “a unique character of humanity.” Furthermore, he explains, “. . . humans are composite beings, manifesting both physicality and spirituality.”²⁰ Integration of the

¹⁷Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 31.

¹⁸Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 244.

¹⁹Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 244.

²⁰Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 46.

spiritual and physical is necessary in order to grow as a believer in wholeness, as several spiritual formation sources demonstrate. The individual dimensions in which believers experience formation include the spiritual, physical, relational, mental, and emotional realms, which are each involved in the pursuit of wholeness in Christ. E. Dee Freeborn, Janine Tartaglia, Wesley Tracy, and Morris Weigelt describe how spiritual formation involves “the whole person in relationship with God, within the community of believers, growing in Christlikeness, reflected in a Spirit-directed, disciplined lifestyle, and demonstrated in redemptive action in our world.”²¹ Kenneth L. Bakken describes how a Christocentric approach is necessary in achieving wholeness because “wholeness flows from a deep, Christ-centered spiritual commitment.”²² A believer is in relationship with God as a whole person, in both soul and body, as Freeborn and his coauthors note, and Christ is the foundation upon which believers are spiritually formed.

The literature suggests that Christian spiritual formation involves the whole person in body and soul, according to how God created human beings, and prioritizes the “restoration of the whole person.”²³ Nancy Pearcey’s recent book, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, makes a significant contribution to the literature regarding a biblical understanding of human embodiment. Arguing for the importance of the whole person, Pearcey states, “A biblical ethic is incarnational. We are made in God’s image to reflect God’s character, both in our minds and in our bodily actions. There is no division, no alienation. We are embodied beings.”²⁴ In Luke 10:25 a

²¹E. Dee Freeborn, Janine Tartaglia, Wesley Tracy, and Morris Weigelt, *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and Holy Living* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1993), 12.

²²Kenneth Bakken, *The Call to Wholeness: Health as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1985), 2.

²³Daniel E. Fountain, *Health, the Bible, and the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1989), 49.

²⁴Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 34.

lawyer asks Jesus what must be done to inherit eternal life. Regarding this, Michael Lodahl argues, “It is not sufficient to believe certain things or think certain ways or to undergo spiritual experiences; instead, it suggests that the eternal life about which this Torah student asked involves quite seriously how one lives as a body among bodies in a material, creaturely world.”²⁵ Christian spiritual formation literature that integrates the physical body proposes that the connection between spiritual development and human embodiment is crucial—it cannot be assumed that believers will automatically understand its significance. Howard explains, “. . . that very effort to nurture our relationship with God is bound to affect many areas of our lives. Spiritual formation will shape educational formation, liturgical formation, our approach to health, and so on.”²⁶ Recognizing God’s purposes for creating human beings in both soul and body has significant implications for the spiritual formation of believers.

Defining Christian Spiritual Formation

Definitions of Christian spiritual formation vary throughout the literature base, but generally center “on the progressive transformation of the human person into the likeness of Jesus Christ” and involve the process of being formed and continually transformed.²⁷ The literature also differs in how human embodiment is integrated, if at all, within models of spiritual formation. Several notable authors regard the physical body as relevant to spiritual formation, such as Boa, Chandler, Maddix, Willard, and Howard who will each be covered in turn.²⁸ These authors assert that it is necessary to consider

²⁵Michael E. Lodahl, “And He Felt Compassion: Holiness Beyond the Bounds of Community,” in *Embodied Holiness*, ed. Michael E. Lodahl and Samuel M. Powell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 151.

²⁶Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

²⁷Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 240.

²⁸For additional insight into how human embodiment is regarded by each of these authors see Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2001; Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for*

human embodiment in spiritual development, but each text approaches this relationship from a different perspective and attributes varying levels of importance to it. Other prominent authors, such as Whitney and Foster, address the spiritual disciplines as they relate to the spiritual formation of believers, yet only refer to aspects of human embodiment as it relates to fasting or particular areas of stewardship, such as how time or money is handled by the believer.

In his book *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, Boa catalogs several approaches to spiritual formation, including what he describes as holistic spirituality. Holistic spirituality is described as “an integrated life,” and Boa states,

An integrated life requires a connection between faith and living, between claiming to follow Christ and becoming like him, between belief and character, between profession and practice. When the focus of the heart is on the eternal, secular activities become spiritual and the ordinary takes on a new dimension. Our relationship with Christ was never meant to be a component of our lives, but to be the central hub to which every spoke is connected.²⁹

Boa integrates aspects of human embodiment into his holistic spirituality model based on this reality: “God owns all things, and we are accountable to him for everything we have and use.”³⁰ He explains, “This includes our bodies (Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 6:19-20), our minds (Rom 12:2; 1 Pet 1:13), our opportunities (Col 4:5), and our environment (Gen 1:28-30).”³¹ Boa’s language regarding human embodiment implies that human beings can somehow be removed from their bodies, yet emphasizes the need for integration and a holistic approach to spirituality. This demonstrates the need for additional Christian

Personal and Relational Wellness (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014); Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 244; Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*.

²⁹Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 213.

³⁰Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 248.

³¹Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 248.

spiritual formation literature that not only integrates the whole person in a holistic manner, but also provides a deeper insight into the influence that human embodiment has in the spiritual development of believers.

Furthermore, Boa describes how Christ is central in a holistic spirituality model where formation is a product of being centered on him. A holistic approach to spirituality involves “an aspiration for a single-minded pursuit that centers around Christ in all activities.”³² He explains how “the outer life not only consists in our physical ‘earthsuits,’ but also includes activities such as hobbies, sports, entertainment, and other forms of recreation.”³³ Boa says these should be “centered on Christ in such a way that his presence is evident.”³⁴ Boa affirms that spiritual formation is a Christ-centered process that involves all aspects of human life.

Diane Chandler’s model in her book *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness*, is *imago Dei* centered, which she describes as means of being Christ-centered because Jesus is the perfect expression of the image of God.³⁵ Furthermore, she elaborates on how human embodiment relates to spiritual development, especially in regard to physical health and wellness and resource stewardship. Boa recognizes that human embodiment is an aspect of holistic spirituality by describing how the outward actions of human beings start with the body, “the instrument of our agency and expression in the world we know through

³²Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 213.

³³Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 225.

³⁴Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 225.

³⁵For additional information on Chandler’s rationale for placing the *imago Dei* at the center of her Christian spiritual formation model, see Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 31-41. Chap. 5 discusses why this thesis maintains Christ himself at the center of the proposed spiritual formation model.

our five senses.”³⁶ Boa and Chandler both describe spiritual formation as a holistic process that involves several dimensions.

Chandler contends for a whole person approach to spiritual formation and her book seeks to fill in the gap where more spiritual formation literature is needed that addresses the spiritual development of believers from a holistic, multidisciplinary approach. Chandler states, “The word *Christian* connotes that all personal formation flows from the person of God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.”³⁷ Furthermore, she says, “The word *spiritual* relates to more than simply the nonphysical and mystical components of life lived in God; rather, it is utilized to describe all dimensions of life as influenced by the Spirit.”³⁸ She continues, “*Formation* refers to both what is formed and the manner in which it is shaped.”³⁹ Chandler further defines spiritual formation “as an interactive process by which God the Father fashions believers into the image of his Son, Jesus, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit by fostering development in seven primary life dimensions (spirit, emotions, relationships, intellect, vocation, physical health, and resource stewardship).”⁴⁰ Spiritual formation involves the ongoing transformation into Christlikeness within the lives of believers.

Likewise, Maddix explains that spiritual formation “begins with a focus on being ‘formed’ and ‘transformed’” as the “human person is being transformed into the ‘image and likeness of Christ.’”⁴¹ Second, he reiterates how “spiritual formation focuses

³⁶Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 225.

³⁷Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

³⁸Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

³⁹Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

⁴⁰Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 19.

⁴¹Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 240.

on our human participation and obedience to Jesus Christ.”⁴² Maddix continues to describe how spiritual formation occurs throughout the lifespan and within the community setting.⁴³ Lastly, he explains how “spiritual formation includes the nurturing of self and relationship to others.”⁴⁴ Spiritual formation is a multidimensional, integrative process according to particular resources in the literature base, but this distinctive is particularly underdeveloped according to Maddix. He describes how spiritual formation is a relatively new movement within the Protestant Christian realm and began as a way to emphasize the focus on the soul versus the potential overemphasis on cognitive transmission within Christian education.⁴⁵ Maddix further expounds on how several related terms are utilized within the literature, such as Christian education, spiritual growth, spiritual development, faith development, and spiritual formation, and that it appears that the “literature is moving toward the language of ‘Christian formation’ to provide a more encompassing term.”⁴⁶

Arguing for an understanding of spiritual formation that is integrative, Howard states, “Spiritual formation can no longer be neatly separated from community, liturgy, mission, or education.”⁴⁷ He explains how it is necessary to explore the key terms, “Christian,” “spiritual,” and “formation” individually in order to understand all of the elements that are involved in Christian spiritual formation.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Howard describes his working spiritual formation definition as, “a Spirit- and human-led process

⁴²Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 242.

⁴³Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 242.

⁴⁴Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 244.

⁴⁵Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 247.

⁴⁶Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” 246-47.

⁴⁷Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 10.

⁴⁸Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 10.

by which individuals and communities mature in relationship with the Christian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and are changed into ever-greater likeness to the life and gospel of this God.”⁴⁹ He advocates for an understanding of formation that recognizes it as process involving a variety of factors, such as the contexts and means of formation.⁵⁰

Additionally, Willard describes spiritual formation as the process in which believers are transformed into Christlikeness through following Christ in how he lived.⁵¹ He explains that believers “can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced,” such as “solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God’s Word and God’s ways, and service to others.”⁵² He argues that following these spiritual disciplines “intelligently and enthusiastically” will result in “a full, grace-filled, Christlike life.”⁵³ Willard states,

By contrast, the secret of the standard, historically proved spiritual disciplines is precisely that they do respect and count on the bodily nature of human personality. They all deeply and essentially involve bodily conditions and activities. Thus they show us effectively *how* we can ‘offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God’ and how our ‘spiritual worship’ (Rom 12:1) really is inseparable from the offering up of our bodies in specific physical ways. Paul’s teachings, especially when added to his practices, strongly suggest that he understood and practiced something vital about the Christian life that we have lost—and that we must do our best to recover. He further argues that believers must experience Christlike transformation in all aspects of their lives or else the church is failing to address the whole person.⁵⁴

According to Willard, the church must address the whole person in order to be holistically transformed into the image of Christ.

⁴⁹Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

⁵⁰Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 11.

⁵¹Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, ix.

⁵²Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, ix.

⁵³Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, xii.

⁵⁴Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 18.

Furthermore, holistic transformation involves the practice of the spiritual disciplines. This involves the whole person, which is not an aspect that literature on the spiritual disciplines tends to address at length. Donald Whitney's discussion is oriented toward the spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, worship, evangelism, and other practices, and restricts discussion of human embodiment to how it relates to fasting and the stewardship of time and money.⁵⁵ Whitney may recognize that the spiritual disciplines involve various aspects of person and are possible because of the reality of embodiment, but has chosen to limit his discussion to particular areas. Similarly, Richard Foster describes spiritual disciplines as they relate to the formation of believers. Again, embodiment is addressed, but it is primarily within the context of fasting.⁵⁶ Therefore, an opportunity exists in the literature base for deeper consideration and discussion as to how human embodiment is involved in spiritual formation.

Stewardship is a process involved in Christian spiritual formation and a means by which believers are transformed into Christlikeness. Whitney discusses how believers should practice stewardship for the purpose of godliness, which is the result of a disciplined spiritual life.⁵⁷ Whitney further explains how the spiritual disciplines are like spiritual exercises in that spiritual disciplines produce godliness; whereas physical disciplines, such as using weight machines at the gym for example, result in strength.⁵⁸ Similarly, Foster utilizes the example of an occasional jogger that trains over time to prepare for a marathon in order to explain how believers are to do the same as they

⁵⁵Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2014).

⁵⁶Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 35.

⁵⁷Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 159.

⁵⁸Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 12.

practice the spiritual disciplines, such as prayer.⁵⁹ Often, the church is quick to utilize analogies that compare the physical body to spiritual development, but the comparison often ends with the spiritual application. Application for the physical body is generally lacking in spiritual disciplines literature, beyond the previously mentioned aspects of fasting or stewardship. Stewardship of physical health, ironically, is usually not discussed. Benedict Ashley provides a more inclusive picture of stewardship: “As God’s stewards, men and women should preserve the ecology of their earthly environment, the sanctity of the human body, and the natural structures of the family.”⁶⁰ According to Ashley, believers are stewards of all that God has entrusted to their care, which impacts their spiritual development and how they experience wholeness in Christ.

Carl Braaten and LaVonne Braaten reflect on how attributing value to the whole person relates to Jesus. They state,

The vision of the whole person and his absolute worth is tied to the wholeness of life and salvation in Jesus Christ. For he alone is the embodiment of the wholeness of God. This dimension of God’s presence in the person of Jesus can contribute to the quest for a holistic perspective and help overcome the fragmenting of the person.⁶¹

The Braatens infer that emphasizing the relationship between Christian spiritual formation and the reality of embodiment glorifies God because it regards human beings from a holistic perspective. As previously discussed, several Christian spiritual formation authors recognize the need to regard human beings from a holistic perspective. These authors often describe how Christian spiritual formation involves the transformation of the whole person into Christlikeness as each facet involved in spiritual development is

⁵⁹Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 35.

⁶⁰Benedict M. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, MA: The Pope John Center, 1985), xvii.

⁶¹Carl E. Braaten and LaVonne Braaten, *The Living Temple: A Practical Theology of the Body and Foods of the Earth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 24-25.

addressed.

Christian Health and Wellness

Wellness, a dynamic and multifaceted concept, can be defined as a state of wellbeing in all areas of life and is characterized by flourishing. Wellness includes care of the dimensions that are expressions of the body and soul, which include spiritual, physical, relational, mental, and emotional capacities. Additionally, these dimensions are interrelated. Laura Hendrickson maintains, “It is important to realize that every emotion involves a complex interaction between body and soul. For example, the Bible teaches that improving the way that our body feels can change our emotions for the better.”⁶² According to Hendrickson, wellness involves the care of all aspects of the person because of the interaction that occurs between each dimension, recognizing that it is God who has sovereignly created human beings as embodied.⁶³ Jeff Forrey and Jim Newheiser explore the connection between the mind and body and its implications for counseling. They explain how the heart is the “initiator of lifestyle choices” and “is both the locus of moral responsibility and the focus of God’s judgment,” where as “the body is the instrument it uses to carry out its desires.”⁶⁴ As opposed to a holistic view of humanity that regards the human person as integrated, Forrey and Newheiser describe the heart as being separate from the body, yet contained within it, which communicates a compartmentalized view. They use the heart as a metaphor, but confuse it with the actual organ of the heart, as that is what would be actually contained within the physical body. This demonstrates part of

⁶²Laura Hendrickson, “The Complex Mind/Body Connection,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 2013), 415.

⁶³Hendrickson, “The Complex Mind/Body Connection,” 415.

⁶⁴Jeff Forrey and Jim Newheiser, “The Influences on the Human Heart,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 2013), 127.

the confusion surrounding human embodiment that is prevalent within the literature.

Related to such confusion, the Western church is unsure, at times, of how to address the topic of wellness and human embodiment from a biblical perspective—or if it should even be discussed within the church context at all. If the body is discussed at all, it is usually addressed from the physical health perspective. As a result, Christian health and wellness literature has greatly increased within the past several years. Current Christian health and wellness literature is often utilized when a church chooses to address the topic of physical health. Therefore, these resources must be carefully considered in order to discern whether or not they adequately address biblical and theological foundations for human embodiment and how embodiment relates to spiritual formation. Better yet, literature that addresses human embodiment from the spiritual formation perspective would create a paradigm in which physical health and wellness could be biblically understood and applied.

Christian health and wellness literature varies widely in how the body is addressed, especially in relation to spiritual development. There is a tendency within the literature to primarily focus on the physical body while integrating generalized spiritual principles or truths. While some spiritual formation literature tends to underemphasize the role of human embodiment in spiritual development, Christian health and wellness literature can overemphasize the physical body, leading to further compartmentalization. This overemphasis on the body could lead to a more materialistic understanding of the human person, embracing a loose understanding of the relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation.

In recent years, health and wellness literature has become more widely utilized in the Western church context; this includes the rising popularity of books such as *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* by Rick Warren, Daniel Amen, and Mark Hyman, along with the accompanying study guide and cookbook. Christian resources such as *The Daniel Fast* by Susan Gregory, *The Daniel Cure* by Susan Gregory and

Richard Bloomer, *The Maker's Diet* by Jordan Rubin, and *Wellness for the Glory of God* by John Dunlop are also utilized. These books make a significant contribution to the literature base and demonstrate the importance in caring for physical health and overall wellness according to Scripture. However, an opportunity still exists within the literature base for a less compartmentalized understanding of the relationship between human embodiment and spiritual development. Such literature would address embodiment, as related to the spiritual formation of believers, and health and wellness would be described as an element of living a holy, God-glorifying life.

In his book *The Daniel Plan*, Warren explains how he was convicted that he should be stewarding his physical health as a pastor, so that he could model a healthy, God-honoring lifestyle for his congregation. Often, Christian health and wellness literature tends to be inspired by the author's personal convictions and experience. This is also the case with Rubin's book *The Makers Diet*; and John Dunlop's experience as a medical doctor, which he discusses in his book *Wellness for the Glory of God*.

The Daniel Plan provides an overview of how to achieve wellness within the following areas: faith, food, fitness, friends (community), and focus—or transformation of thinking regarding health. The book includes a 40-day meal plan and fitness challenge in order to demonstrate how believers are to put healthy lifestyle choices into action in their daily lives. Warren explains, "I have listened to thousands of sermons on what God has to say about our souls, our minds, our wills, and our emotions. But not once had I ever heard an entire sermon on God's view of our bodies. The subject was completely ignored. This is why most people still have no theology of health."⁶⁵ As Warren describes, a theology of health is also a necessity within the Western church due to the lack of teaching on the subject. Similarly, reflecting on her personal experiences, Rachel

⁶⁵Rick Warren, Daniel Amen, and Mark Hyman, *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 18.

Stone states, “There was little difference between Christians and non-Christians in attitude toward food, bodies, and dieting. I never heard the ‘make your body perfect’ message . . . soundly refuted by good theology.”⁶⁶ She further explains that the church utilized books, such *Free to Be Thin* and *The Weigh Down Diet*, “which baptized the ‘worldly’ desire to be thin for appearance’s sake with the dubious motives of discipline and being a ‘better’ (read ‘thinner’) witness for Jesus.”⁶⁷ As Stone demonstrates, a biblically and theologically informed foundation for understanding the physical body is lacking in some Christian health and wellness literature. There is a need not only for a theology of health, but ultimately, a biblical understanding of human embodiment as it relates to the spiritual formation of believers.

In addition to a lack of teaching on the subject, Warren expresses concern that dualistic philosophy has influenced how believers view the body. He argues, “Today we make the same common mistake Greek philosophers did thousands of years ago. Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato believed in dualism, which include the idea that your mind (or spirit) is important, but your body isn’t important spiritually. They devalued the body. In fact, some Greek philosophers taught that your body is evil.”⁶⁸ He further explains how Scripture argues against radical dualism, in that the “body is holy because God made it, and everything God makes has a purpose.”⁶⁹ Additionally, believers are to glorify God through the body, “so we can’t compartmentalize our lives and think that we can divorce

⁶⁶Rachel Marie Stone, *Eat with Joy: Redeeming God’s Gift of Food* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 13.

⁶⁷Stone, *Eat with Joy*, 13; Marie Chapien and Neva Coyle, *The All New Free to Be Thin* (Ada, MI: Bethany House, 1994); Gwen Shamblins, *The Weigh Down Diet: Inspirational Way to Lose Weight, Stay Slim, and Find a New You* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

⁶⁸Warren, Amen, and Hyman, *The Daniel Plan*, 19.

⁶⁹Warren, Amen, and Hyman, *The Daniel Plan*, 19.

our bodies and live as if only our spirit matters.”⁷⁰

Matthew Lee Anderson rightly posits, “Sometimes evangelicals have been tempted to spiritualize our salvation at the expense of our bodies.”⁷¹ Warren argues that the Bible speaks to the importance of the physical body in several ways, such as how it belongs to God, how it was paid for by Jesus on the cross, how God’s spirit lives within the body, how God expects believers to care for their bodies, and how believers’ bodies will be resurrected when they pass away.⁷² Therefore, he argues that Ephesians 4:22-24 speaks to how believers are to put off the old self in order to put on a new self, so that they may make God-honoring decisions in caring for the physical body.⁷³ The way in which Warren communicates about the body can contribute to a compartmentalized understanding of the human person rather than combating dualism, which he expresses as one of his desires for *The Daniel Plan*.

Lastly, Warren explains how guidance from the Holy Spirit is foundational to lasting change, which also involves choosing wisely, “building your life on the truth,” a transformation in thinking, and participation in community.⁷⁴ According to Warren, lasting change regarding healthy lifestyle choices comes as a result of reliance on God rather than human will power. Even as it infers compartmentalization, *The Daniel Plan* still provides a more thorough discussion on the physical body from a biblical perspective than alternative sources that lean toward utilizing Scripture as a prescription for dietary choices and other aspects of health and wellness.

⁷⁰Warren, Amen, and Hyman, *The Daniel Plan*, 19.

⁷¹Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to Our Faith* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Pub., 2011), 15.

⁷²Warren, Amen, and Hyman, *The Daniel Plan*, 18-21.

⁷³Warren, Amen, and Hyman, *The Daniel Plan*, 22.

⁷⁴Warren, Amen, and Hyman, *The Daniel Plan*, 24-27.

Susan Gregory utilizes the dietary restrictions that are referenced in the book of Daniel within her book *The Daniel Fast*, so that believers may experience renewed spiritual and physical health. She lays out a partial fast that eliminates certain foods based on the Prophet Daniel's fasting experiences.⁷⁵ It appears that Daniel fasted often, according to Gregory.⁷⁶ She explains how "fasting is a tool created by the Father to help bring his children into closer communication and relationship with him" and how it involves "restricting all or some foods for a spiritual purpose."⁷⁷ Gregory states how believers have "a Spirit-led opportunity to feed your soul, strengthen your spirit, and renew your body" through the Daniel fast.⁷⁸ Gregory assumes a trichotomous view of the human person and discusses the elements of spirit, soul, and body at length in chapter four of the book. In discussing how the fast benefits the believer, she argues how eating healthily is good for the body, fasting benefits the soul, and through participation in the Daniel fast, the "spirit will grow in strength and in knowledge of Christ and His ways."⁷⁹ She describes the types of fasting found in Scripture as absolute fasts, normal fasts, and partial fasts.⁸⁰ She further explains that the purpose of the Daniel fast extends beyond food or the goal of eating healthily. She states that the purpose of fasting is found in "setting yourself apart for a specific period of time to focus more on the Lord, prayer, and worship. In other words, the power of fasting is found when you consecrate yourself to

⁷⁵Susan Gregory, *The Daniel Fast: Feed Your Soul, Strengthen Your Spirit, and Renew Your Body* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2010), 17.

⁷⁶Gregory, *The Daniel Fast*, 13-14. Gregory explains that Dan 9:3 describes a normal fasting experience, while Dan 1:12 and Dan 10:3 both describe partial fasts.

⁷⁷Gregory, *The Daniel Fast*, xii.

⁷⁸Gregory, *The Daniel Fast*, 7.

⁷⁹Gregory, *The Daniel Fast*, 20.

⁸⁰Gregory, *The Daniel Fast*, 14.

the Lord and discipline yourself to focus on him.”⁸¹ *The Daniel Fast* utilizes fasting for spiritual development purposes and to assist believers in making healthy, long-term lifestyle choices.

Another text by Susan Gregory co-authored by Richard J. Bloomer, *The Daniel Cure*, demonstrates the scriptural priority of the physical body, revealing God’s call to care for one’s health.⁸² They explain that human beings are created in God’s image and are composed of more than just a body.⁸³ Assuming a trichotomous view of man, they explain that man is more than a body, according to 1 Thessalonians 5:23. They argue, “You are a spirit. You have a soul. You live in a body.”⁸⁴ They argue that “spirit, soul, and body encompass the totality of the human experience” and that “God designed all three parts of us to work together in harmony and health.”⁸⁵ Bloomer and Gregory advocate for an integrated view of human beings instead of a compartmentalized view; their hope for *The Daniel Cure* is that readers of the book will begin to experience “a new desire to give your body the very best care, complete with a new lifestyle aimed at optimizing your health.”⁸⁶ They discuss how poor choices have resulted in a dramatic increase in preventable diseases, which include obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes. They believe Philippians 4:13 should empower believers to understand that they “can clean the temple in which God dwells and rededicate ourselves to caring for it”

⁸¹Gregory, *The Daniel Fast*, 19.

⁸²Richard J. Bloomer and Susan Gregory, *The Daniel Cure: The Daniel Fast Way to Vibrant Health* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 36.

⁸³Bloomer and Gregory, *The Daniel Cure*, 36.

⁸⁴Bloomer and Gregory, *The Daniel Cure*, 36.

⁸⁵Bloomer and Gregory, *The Daniel Cure*, 37.

⁸⁶Bloomer and Gregory, *The Daniel Cure*, 37.

through the strength that only God can give.⁸⁷ Additionally, they advocate for establishing the fast on the foundation of daily time with God in prayer, but allow believers the freedom to practice these disciplines as they choose, even allowing the opportunity to include additional spiritual practices throughout the course of the fast.⁸⁸ They argue that focusing on spiritual practices, alongside dietary and lifestyle changes, will result in significant growth. Finally, they encourage believers to “seek the Lord” in everything, and “accept his gift of grace as he empowers . . . a lifestyle of health.”⁸⁹

Similar to Gregory and Boomer, Jordan Rubin, author of *The Maker’s Diet*, argues that Scripture and biblical principles are prescriptive regarding health and wellness. Rubin authored *The Makers Diet* after enduring multiple illnesses and finding healing through what he describes as eating according to the Bible. He explains how he speaks “with authority on nutrition, disease, and health” because he has himself “survived the tortuous walk through the valley of disease and death and emerged triumphant.”⁹⁰ He argues that “by following biblically and historically proven health principles, an individual can return to a diet and lifestyle that will lead to regeneration of the entire mind, body, soul, and spirit.”⁹¹ Rubin believes his faith in God is what provided healing and gave him a vision for helping others know God and experience complete health and healing.⁹² Rubin emphasizes relying on God and Scripture for insight into health and wellness.

⁸⁷Bloomer and Gregory, *The Daniel Cure*, 40-41.

⁸⁸Bloomer and Gregory, *The Daniel Cure*, 93.

⁸⁹Bloomer and Gregory, *The Daniel Cure*, 102.

⁹⁰Jordan Rubin, *The Maker’s Diet: The 40-Day Health Experience That Will Change Your Life Forever* (Lake Mary, FL: Siloam, 2005), 29.

⁹¹Rubin, *The Maker’s Diet*, 29.

⁹²Rubin, *The Maker’s Diet*, 30.

Applying Scripture within the context of health and wellness is also at the heart of John Dunlop's book *Wellness for the Glory of God*. He draws on his experience as a physician of 40 years to address physical, mental, social, financial, spiritual, and emotional wellness in the life of a believer. Dunlop orients his writing toward an audience over 40 years old, but the principles relate to believers of all ages. He explains that wellness must be rooted in the eternal rather than the temporal, and argues that the way in which believers experience wellness, especially in later years, is by focusing on "God, his greatness, and his glory."⁹³ He encourages his readers to pray about potentially challenging subjects within the book and to rely on God, through the Spirit, as they seek lifestyle change.⁹⁴ In explaining the concept of wellness, Dunlop explains,

Wellness is much more than physical health and freedom from distressing symptoms. Wellness involves the whole of our being, which includes six distinct areas: physical, mental, social, financial, spiritual, and emotional. These areas of wellness are not independent but are all interrelated. Each area contributes to the well-being of each of the others. At the same time, struggles in one area may detract from wellness in each of the others.⁹⁵

Dunlop argues that physical and mental health can begin to deteriorate due to the aging process or believers may experience financial or relational difficulties; thus it is important to base wellness on more than just health in these areas. Ultimately, he explains that the one area of wellness that matters most is a believer's relationship with God.⁹⁶ Dunlop argues that wellness requires planning. He argues, "We need to carefully define our goals, choose the wisest strategies to accomplish them, and discipline ourselves to implement those strategies if we are going to maximize the chance that we can be well in

⁹³John Dunlop, *Wellness for the Glory of God: Living Well after 40 with Joy and Contentment in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

⁹⁴Dunlop, *Wellness for the Glory of God*, 13.

⁹⁵Dunlop, *Wellness for the Glory of God*, 18.

⁹⁶Dunlop, *Wellness for the Glory of God*, 19.

as many spheres as possible.”⁹⁷ Wellness is multifaceted and extends beyond one’s present physical health, according to Dunlop. He states, “All too often, we think in terms of preserving health so we can enjoy long years on this earth. That is rather shortsighted, for using our health to advance God’s eternal kingdom is much more important than simply prolonging life on earth.”⁹⁸ To Dunlop health is not just related to our current condition, but has eternal significance.

The literature on Christian health and wellness presented in this chapter recognizes a need for integration of all aspects of being human and created in the image of God, yet each source varies in its engagement with biblical and theological truths. Kendra Hotz and Matthew Mathews explain, “Good health allows us to live out our God-given identities.”⁹⁹ Health is important because it relates to how believers regard their embodiment and how they live, according to Hotz and Mathews. Bakken asserts that believers “must become aware of all the facets that contribute to healthy, ‘holy’ living.”¹⁰⁰ According to Bakken, it is necessary to address each facet of a person because wholeness relates to holiness. Each dimension of personhood is integral because “when we lack sufficient awareness of these aspects of life that contribute to our total well-being, health eludes us.”¹⁰¹ When we do not accept that the body is integral to wholeness, “we embrace a spirituality that fosters flight from the world and suppresses the body as the enemy. We become disembodied spirits, and loneliness, depressive guilt feelings, alienation, and anger lead us farther away from the growth and freedom of the

⁹⁷Dunlop, *Wellness for the Glory of God*, 20.

⁹⁸Dunlop, *Wellness for the Glory of God*, 46.

⁹⁹Kendra G. Hotz and Matthew T. Mathews, *Dust and Breath: Faith, Health, and Why the Church Should Care About Both* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 2012), 15.

¹⁰⁰Bakken, *The Call to Wholeness*, 8.

¹⁰¹Bakken, *The Call to Wholeness*, 10.

completeness we so desperately seek,” according to Bakken.¹⁰² However, danger also exists in placing the focus too heavily on the physical body. A balance must exist in which each dimension of the human person is given adequate treatment when discussing the importance of human embodiment in connection with spiritual formation.

God created man as a whole person. Daniel Fountain, states, “We are managers not only of the earth, but likewise of our own selves. Health is our own responsibility, and we are accountable for the management of our bodies, minds, and spirits. We are also responsible and accountable for all of our activities that affect the health and well-being of others.”¹⁰³ According to Fountain, believers are called to care for the whole self, once again including a consistent attention to stewardship. As he explains, this should affect how the individual believer tends to their own personal health, as well as the health of others. Most importantly, God is glorified as believers prioritize care for their health because they are demonstrating a willingness to apply Scripture to all areas of their lives.

Swinton explains that the Bible does not have a word for health as it is understood in Western medicine, but he argues, “The closest approximation to contemporary understandings of health is the Hebrew word *shalom* (*Salôm*), which occurs 250 times in the Hebrew Bible.”¹⁰⁴ He defines *shalom* as peace and says it “encompasses physical and psychological health”¹⁰⁵; one must be restored to a right relationship with God in order to experience peace and health. While a relationship with God does not require physical or psychological health, “such things obviously contribute

¹⁰²Bakken, *The Call to Wholeness*, 23-24.

¹⁰³Fountain, *Health, the Bible, and the Church*, 73.

¹⁰⁴Swinton, “From Health to Shalom,” 233.

¹⁰⁵Swinton, “From Health to Shalom,” 233.

to the experience of *shalom*.¹⁰⁶ Swinton further states, “God desires that His people flourish and care for their bodies and their minds.”¹⁰⁷ God aspires for his people to experience flourishing, but sickness is an unfortunate reality of living in a world impacted by sin. Therefore, some believers may not experience full absence from disease or sickness, but health is often still attainable as one’s relationship with God is nurtured and as they seek wholeness in Christ.

Hendrickson asserts, “The Bible teaches us that what is going on in our body affects what goes on in our hearts. If we’re sleep deprived, sick, in pain, or on medicines that make it harder for us to think clearly, these physical changes will influence our thoughts and emotions. They may even tempt us to make the wrong choices.”¹⁰⁸ Hendrickson suggests that poor stewardship has implications for the individual believer that impacts each aspect of one’s being. Furthermore, Cooper explains, “Each individual Christian body, by means of sacramental incorporation and personal faith, is incorporated into a larger whole, a corporate body, whose perfection in large depends upon the harmonious integrity of its members.”¹⁰⁹ According to Cooper, proper stewardship in regards to health is both internally and externally beneficial and contributes to healthy individuals, marriages, families and ministries. The way in which believers regard their bodies affects other believers. Delgado and Greenwood posit, “All persons, regardless of physical capability or potential, are made in God’s image . . . the Christian legacy of separating the body/nature from the spirit/soul is a distortion of God’s creation; and that the care of our physical bodies through fitness can and does serve as stewardship of the

¹⁰⁶Swinton, “From Health to Shalom,” 233.

¹⁰⁷Swinton, “From Health to Shalom,” 236.

¹⁰⁸Hendrickson, “The Complex Mind/Body Connection,” 415.

¹⁰⁹Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36.

goodness of God's creation that is our body."¹¹⁰ According to the literature, proper stewardship of one's health, as a believer, implies a wholesome appreciation of human embodiment viewed through the lens of Scripture, which informs daily decisions regarding care for oneself and others. However, understanding how human embodiment relates to spiritual formation is a foundational necessity that is not widely addressed in Christian health and wellness literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, developing a biblical and theological foundation for understanding human embodiment, as well as the foundational aspects of health and wellness, provides a necessary connection to including the physical body within Christian spiritual formation models. According to the literature, believers who are striving to steward their health well will be growing in Christlikeness, which glorifies God and encourages flourishing in the individual and in the church as a whole. Stewardship of health and wellness has both temporal and eternal significance.

Scripture demonstrates that God requires stewardship from his people, which applies to all that He has given them. According to the literature, many believers testify to how care of the physical body has benefited them in both physical and spiritual ways. Therefore, it makes sense that a believer who is seeking to steward their health well would experience spiritual growth from obeying God's commands. First Corinthians 6:19–20 describes the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit and says that man does not belong to himself. This passage commands believers to care for the whole person, including the body, because it is God's temple. It is to be treated with dignity and worth because it is sacred. Believers belong to God, which means that they should glorify God

¹¹⁰Teresa Delgado and Tracey C. Greenwood, "A Journey toward Wholeness, a Journey to God: Physical Fitness as Embodied Spirituality," *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no. 3 (September 2013): 943.

with their entire being. Therefore, it is important for believers not to act as though their bodies do not matter. It is necessary to promote whole person wellness in models of Christian formation because God has created human beings in a holistic manner. Therefore, human embodiment is integral to formation overall. The literature demonstrates that current Christian spiritual formation approaches are beginning to consider the implications of human embodiment as significant, but there is still an opportunity to further expand on these discussions; such literature must be both Christ-centered and holistic in its approach.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIO-HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The concept of human embodiment and how it relates to spirituality has been a topic of debate throughout history, as evidenced by the number of philosophical movements and belief systems with divergent viewpoints on the subject. Some advocate for an integrated, holistic understanding of the human person, while others argue for varying degrees of mind-body dualism in which the soul and body are considered at odds with one another. In radical mind-body dualism, the soul is seen as eternal and of utmost importance while the physical body is regarded as evil and something from which the soul longs to escape.

Glimpses of this type of compartmentalization, along with a low view of embodiment, can be observed in modern Christian culture. M. Elizabeth Hall and Erik Thoennes explain, “The ambivalence regarding embodiment reflected in current bodily experiences is also present in Christian theology, which has presented obstacles to constructing a sound theology of embodiment.”¹ A lack of concern for the physical body has discouraged the development of a proper theological understanding of embodiment. In order to address this need, it is essential to observe how human embodiment has been regarded over time; doing so demonstrates the opportunity for a more unified understanding of the human person as created by God.

This chapter provides an overview of mind-body dualism as it appears within Greco-Roman philosophy, specifically in Platonism, as well as a discussion on radical

¹M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall and Erik Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies: Implications of the Incarnation for Embodiment and Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 36, no. 1 (October 2006), 33.

mind-body dualism evident in Gnosticism. Responses from New Testament writers and early church fathers demonstrate how these philosophies and belief systems were considered to be contrary to Scripture and Christian orthodoxy. This discussion demonstrates the ways in which the relationship between the body and soul has been viewed historically. Lastly, an overview of how physical and spiritual compartmentalization has influenced the Western church today proves that issues surrounding human embodiment have not been resolved yet.

The modern Western church context has, at times, operated from a compartmentalized understanding of the human person based on a high view of knowledge and spiritual development. This view separates the physical and the spiritual dimensions of human beings, which can lead to the elevation of the soul at the cost of the body; thus, elements of radical mind-body dualism, similar to what has existed historically, can be readily observed in current Christian culture. Recent research in the area of neuroscience and related fields provide helpful contributions that demonstrate the significance of human embodiment and reiterate the reality that human beings are to be considered as integrated, holistic persons. However, a theology of human embodiment based on Scripture is ultimately what is necessary in order to rectify issues of compartmentalization.

Mind-Body Dualism in Greco-Roman Philosophy

Classical philosophers viewed the relationship between the soul and the body in a variety of ways. Mind-body dualism is a foundational aspect in Greco-Roman philosophy, which prioritizes the soul at the expense of the body. This type of dualistic perspective resulted in elevating the spiritual realities over physical matter in metaphysical dualism. This perspective also included mind-body dualism in which the soul—or everlasting part of humanity—was prioritized over the physical body. Plato

advocated for mind-body dualism in which he proposed a low view of the matter (including the physical body) and a high view of the soul.

Platonic Dualism

Platonism exemplifies the role that mind-body dualism played in Greek philosophy. While Greco-Roman philosophers each addressed the relationship between the mind and the body in their own way, dualism was a prevailing perspective. A comprehensive discussion of individual philosophers is beyond the scope of this chapter, but Platonism will be discussed in order to demonstrate a significant movement in mind-body dualism. Dualism has largely influenced the Western understanding of the human person, as Gray explains:

Dualism is the most common concept of soul in Western societies. The soul is made of different stuff, separate from the body. The Greek philosopher Plato (c427–348 BC) believed that souls were pre-existent, immortal, spiritual substances trapped inside bodies. Many Christians hold a Platonist view, seeing the soul escaping at death to be with God. However, (most of) the Bible suggests that the soul is not an extra separate bit, but that we human beings are ensouled bodies.²

According to Plato, the soul was superior to the physical body as the body was considered part of the material world. Bryan Litfin explains, “Platonism emphasized finding the highest spiritual ideals that transcend the physical world.”³ Plato established a hierarchy of the soul and body where he “consistently opposed materialism, arguing that the soul must be prior to the body rather than a product of it,” according to R. W. Sharples.⁴ Similarly, Paula Gooder argues that Plato believed “the body limited the soul’s potential For Plato, the soul was . . . constrained by the body, which constantly

²Alison J. Gray, “Whatever Happened to the Soul? Some Theological Implications of Neuroscience,” *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture* 13, no. 6 (September 2010): 638.

³Bryan M. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 45.

⁴R. W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicurians, and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 33.

changed and was, as a result, regarded as evil.”⁵ Influences of asceticism can be identified within Platonism in which he believed that the body hindered, rather than helped, spiritual development; Sharples argues that this was a similar argument in support of Christian asceticism.⁶

Plato believed that the soul was of greater importance than the physical body in the same way that the spiritual realm was more significant than the material world and all contained therein. Frederick Copleston explains, “The reality of the soul and its pre-eminence over the body finds emphatic expression in Plato’s psychological dualism, which corresponds to his metaphysical dualism.”⁷ Plato described human beings as tripartite, which included rational, spirited, and appetitive dimensions; according to him, the soul and the body are unequal in value and significance, which is evident in how he regarded the three dimensions.

First, the rational dimension was considered to be “immortal and akin to the divine,” and was therefore of most importance.⁸ Secondly, the spirited dimension was considered “noble (in man more akin to moral courage), and is, or should be, the natural ally of reason.”⁹ Finally, the appetitive dimension “refers to bodily desires.”¹⁰ The spirited and appetitive dimensions were restricted to the physical body and the material world and were considered of less importance in comparison to the rational. Plato relied

⁵Paula Gooder, *Body: Biblical Spirituality for the Whole Person* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 20.

⁶Sharples, *Stoics, Epicurians, and Sceptics*, 86.

⁷Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, *Greece and Rome* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1962), 232.

⁸Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, 232.

⁹Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, 232.

¹⁰Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, 234.

heavily on internal conflict as proof for a tripartite understanding of the soul, but Copleston argues that a more unified understanding of the soul is necessary versus the dualistic option that Plato proposed.¹¹ He explains,

It should, however, be noted that the fact that we feel this conflict within ourselves demands a more unified view of the soul than is afforded by the Platonic psychology. For, if there were a plurality of souls within man—the rational and the irrational—then our consciousness of the conflict as taking place within ourselves and the consciousness of moral responsibility would be inexplicable. I do not mean to imply that Plato was entirely blind to the truth, but rather to suggest that he laid such stress on one aspect of the truth that he tended to neglect the other aspect, and so failed to give any really satisfactory rational psychology.¹²

To Plato, his reliance on this internal conflict as evidence for a tripartite understanding provided proof for how the three dimensions were at odds with one another. He elevated the eternal part of the soul against the other two dimensions while also advocating for a low view of matter, including the physical body. This low view of matter was not only evident in Platonic dualism, but in Gnosticism as well.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism, a complex movement, that gained popularity in the third century, was characterized by disdain for the physical body and all matter, which was regarded as evil. As Hall and Thoennes explain, “Gnosticism arose out of a heavy reliance on Greek philosophy, especially the Platonic separation of matter and spirit (with spirit being a higher order of being) and the Aristotelian concept of divine impassibility (the notion that God does not experience pain or pleasure from the actions of another being).”¹³ While Plato held a low view of matter as it relates to mind-body dualism, Gnosticism was characterized by radical mind-body dualism in which the physical world was considered

¹¹Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, 236.

¹²Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, 236.

¹³Hall and Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies,” 33.

evil and irredeemable. Robert Segal describes Gnosticism as such:

[T]he belief in a radical dualism of immateriality and matter. Immateriality was divine and wholly good. Matter was irredeemably evil. Through a cosmic upheaval, immateriality became trapped in matter—human souls trapped in human bodies. Since this entrapment was hidden, liberation required knowledge (*gnosis*), which in turn required a savior like Jesus to reveal it.¹⁴

Docetism, one agent of Gnosticism, even denied that Jesus existed in the flesh because of its low view of material reality and the physical body. Docetism rejected the humanity of Christ. This type of diversion from essential Christian doctrine demonstrates the danger that exists in elevating the soul at the expense of the body. The effects of mind-body dualism, as it encompassed a low view of matter, became a threat to Christian orthodoxy because it resulted in some denying the humanity of Jesus. Gnostics and Docetists argued that since matter—including the physical body—is evil, then Jesus could not have possibly existed in human form.

The incarnation is an essential aspect of Christian doctrine and to deny Jesus' humanity is to deny the gospel. The Bible testifies to Jesus' manifestation in the flesh, on the earth as Paul describes in 1 Timothy 3:16. In order to combat the many false prophets in the world, John explains that believers must test every spirit to discern whether they are from God or the antichrist (1 John 4:1-3). Those that are of God will testify that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh" and those who deny this truth are of the antichrist (1 John 4:2-3). Platonic philosophy and Gnosticism reveal the dangers of mind-body dualism and demonstrate how a biblical understanding of human embodiment is necessary. Operating from a dualistic perspective either leads to extreme asceticism or licentiousness, as it did within Gnosticism.¹⁵ Both of these perspectives dishonor God and

¹⁴Robert A. Segal, "Religion: Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?*," *Times Literary Supplement* (November 21, 2003): 31.

¹⁵Benjamin Walker, *Gnosticism: Its History and Influence* (Wellingborough, England: Crucible, 1989), 16.

his creation, including the physical body. Denial of Christ's humanity in Docetism and similar worldviews reveals the dangerous effects of a radical dualistic worldview. A further overview of Gnosticism and refutation of it according to the New Testament writers and early church fathers will provide a clearer picture of the dangers inherent in radical mind-body dualism.

Radical Mind-Body Dualism

Radical mind-body dualism is a main component of Gnosticism, as it speaks to matters from a cosmological and anthropological perspective.¹⁶ Gnosticism describes and understands humanity differently than Christianity, but appropriates Christian concepts. As previously mentioned, their beliefs vary among the different gnostic sects: some ascribe to a dichotomous view, some to a trichotomous view, and others to a fourfold understanding of humanity.¹⁷ Benjamin Walker explains, "In the gnostic view, all men are made up of three basic elements: body, mind, and spirit. In each person, the underlying essence of one or other of these three elements predominates, and this establishes the type of person he is, and to that degree also determines his destiny."¹⁸ Radical dualism affected several dynamics within the gnostic belief system. Urban Von Wahlde argues that within most forms of Gnosticism, "there is dualism within God, within humanity, and within the world."¹⁹ John Davidson Kelly says that within Gnosticism "there is a spiritual element in man, or at any rate in the elite of mankind,

¹⁶Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1987), 57.

¹⁷Alastair H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub.), 167-68.

¹⁸Walker, *Gnosticism*, 60.

¹⁹Urban C. Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and the Judaisms of the First Century: The Search for the Wider Context of the Johannine Literature and Why It Matters* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 40.

which is a stranger in this world and which yearns to be freed from matter and to ascend to its true home.”²⁰ According to Gnosticism, the soul longed for freedom from its evil prison of both the physical body and the world. According to gnostic teaching, the physical body and the material world were inherently evil and humanity would only be truly free in death, as the soul is separated from its material bondage.

Walker describes how “in the Gnostic view the soul, coming as it does from the spiritual plane, cannot immediately be enshrined within a gross material body. It remembers its heavenly abode and is reluctant to remain entrapped in matter.”²¹ They considered the soul to be divine and superior to the body, which was labeled as anti-divine. Human beings possessed “an immortal soul incarcerated within a physical body.”²² Again, the dimensions of humanity vary across the gnostic sects, but generally saw a much deeper divide between the spiritual and material than Platonic dualism.²³

Alastair Logan states,

[T]he Gnostic claim is that not only is the human form, made ‘in the image of God,’ not the divine element, but an inferior copy made by lower powers ignorant of or hostile to God, if nevertheless in imitation of a heavenly archetype; neither is the ‘divine’ soul, since it too originates from these same powers. The real divine element for the Gnostics is the spirit, seed, ‘inner man,’ or whatever, which is not a natural endowment but an alien element from the supra-heavenly sphere, present only in the elect or to which they alone respond.²⁴

They believed that the demiurge created the physical body from the earth and that it was considered to be a covering for the soul. According to Birger Pearson, gnostics argued that “the human body and the lower emotive soul belong to this world, whereas the

²⁰John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (New York: Continuum International, 2011), 26.

²¹Walker, *Gnosticism*, 56.

²²Walker, *Gnosticism*, 57.

²³Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, 168.

²⁴Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, 168.

higher self (the mind or spirit) is consubstantial with the transcendent God from which it originated.”²⁵ Their dualistic perspective even went as far as to “refer to mortal man as the stinking body, the fabric of pollution, the seed-bed of wickedness, the fount of corruption, ridden with the itch of greed and concupiscence, the living death, the walking grave,” Walker states.²⁶ Walker also says that Marcion of Sinope, the figure behind Marcionism, “speaks in brutal terms of the ignominy of man, created in loathsome matter, conceived in the filth of sexuality, born amid the unclean, excruciating and grotesque convulsions of labour, into a body that is a ‘sack of excrement,’ until death turns it into carrion, a nameless corpse a worm-filled cadaver.”²⁷ These perspectives make it clear that most gnostics operated from a hatred of the physical body. Christians of the time were teaching a much different message than that which the gnostics were promoting. Writings from the early church fathers have assisted in providing insight into the teachings of Gnosticism, as well as understanding how Christians responded to the movement.

Gnosticism and the Early Church

New Testament writers sought to address the proto-gnostic heresies, which they saw as a threat to the gospel. Gnostic teachings were considered to be a disruption to the unity of the church and to orthodox Christian doctrine, as it was understood at the

²⁵Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 13.

²⁶Walker, *Gnosticism*, 61.

²⁷Walker, *Gnosticism*, 61. Marcionism was a belief system that originated in the second century. The teachings originated with Marcion of Sinope, a philosopher from Pontus. Similar to Gnosticism, a main component of Marcionism was metaphysical dualism, which established the foundation for how humanity was viewed. Materialism, including the earth, the physical body, and all other physical entities were considered evil, while all non-material, spiritual aspects were good and superior to the material. For more on Marcionism, see Judith Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

time. Gnostic sects and teachers were not addressed by name within the New Testament, but false doctrine similar to what the gnostics promoted was refuted within several passages.

One such false teaching was Docetism, which was an element of Gnosticism. Docetism “sought to ‘protect’ the divinity of Christ by diminishing (or denying) the human aspect of Jesus.”²⁸ Gnosticism regarded the physical body as evil, which can also be observed in the Docetic view that denied the incarnation of Christ. Docetism argued that if material reality, including the physical body was evil, then Jesus could not have possibly come in the flesh. Docetism also viewed Jesus as separate from the Christ. The radical mind-body dualistic perspective that was foundational in Docetism and Gnosticism constituted heresy, as it prevented them from accepting an orthodox understanding of Christ’s humanity, one of the most vital and foundational Christian doctrines.

Response of the New Testament Writers

The Apostle John rebukes Docetism in 1 and 2 John. He exhorts believers to test the spirits to see if they are of God in 1 John 4:2-4. John states that those who deny Jesus was from God and that he existed in the flesh are antichrists, where as those who believe that he was the Son of God and had a physical body were of God. 2 John 7 also regards those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh as antichrists. Von Wahlde notes that the language of “coming in” refers to what Jesus accomplished through the flesh, not just that he came in the flesh.²⁹ He states, “‘To come in’ refers to the means by which the purposes of Jesus are realized. It is not simply a statement indicating that Jesus appeared in the flesh. Rather, the flesh was the means by which his saving purposes were

²⁸Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and Judaisms*, 62.

²⁹Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and Judaisms*, 76.

achieved.”³⁰ Therefore, Docetism denied the salvific work of Christ as a result of arguing that Jesus just “appeared.” They did not accept that he physically came to earth in the flesh.

In 2 John 10, John exhorts believers not to receive anyone promoting this kind of teaching into their homes. Litfin says, “Biblical writers had very quickly identified such early Gnostic tendencies as a threat to the faith.”³¹ Furthermore, John Stott argues, “The fundamental Christian doctrine which can never be compromised concerns the eternal divine-human person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”³² Denying that Jesus came in the flesh and accomplished his salvific work while existing in a physical body demonstrates the dangers inherent in radical mind-body dualism. Gnosticism and Docetism reveal how a negative view of materialism, including the physical body, directly impacts one’s understanding of humanity, Jesus, and the gospel.

In Acts 8, Simon Magus is described as a magician who amazed the people of Samaria to the extent that they described him as the power of God (Acts 8:9-10). The writer of Acts does not describe him as a proto-gnostic figure, but according to Litfin, “The orthodox fathers often depicted Simon Magus from Acts 8 as the fountainhead of this heretical trajectory” who “represented a first-century form of pseudo-Christian speculation about angelic powers that other heretics taught as well.”³³ Those with such beliefs argued that salvation came as a means of knowledge and spiritual power. Simon Magus represents someone who subscribed to similar beliefs and operated according to false teaching, as evidenced in Acts 8:9-11; Luke speaks against these ideas within the

³⁰Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and Judaisms*, 76.

³¹Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 69.

³²John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 155.

³³Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 68-69.

passage.

In Colossians, Paul addresses how “the false teachers in Colossae had embraced human philosophies (2:8), Jewish legalism (2:16), the worship of angels (2:18), and asceticism on the premise that the body is evil (2:21-23).”³⁴ Although he does not identify these teachers as proto-gnostics, their false teachings represented “similar gnostic-type beliefs.”³⁵ They advocated for spiritual enlightenment through human motivation and personal capability rather than teaching salvation as available only through faith in Jesus Christ. They promoted human philosophies that were established “according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8); Paul’s words reveal his belief that they were a result of demonic influence. Paul also references ascetic teaching that was based on the belief that the body was evil. Based on a radical mind-body dualist perspective, gnostics tended toward either licentiousness or asceticism. They viewed the body as evil, so it either did not matter how one used it (licentiousness) or they believed that it should be disciplined into submission (asceticism).

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul argues that how Christians consider the body is important and that they must resist cultural temptation to either indulge in the flesh or to completely disregard the body. He explains that culture may declare all things as lawful, but that does not mean that they are helpful or beneficial for the believer (1 Cor 6:12). Barrett says that Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand the following, “Christian freedom must be limited by regard for the true well-being of the self Christian liberty is not license, for license is not more, but less than liberty.”³⁶ While exhorting the

³⁴Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 69.

³⁵Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 69.

³⁶Charles Kingsley Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 146.

Corinthians to abstain from sexual immorality, Paul explains that the body is to be utilized for God's purposes (1 Cor 6:13). It is evident that Paul is not supporting asceticism or licentiousness, but rather a God-glorifying posture in how believers regard their physical bodies. As Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 6:13, the body is meant for the Lord and the Lord for the body. Therefore, believers should abstain from sexual immorality and should take seriously how they regard their bodies.

Response of the Church Fathers

During the second and third centuries, the early church fathers sought to refute claims that would later be integrated into Gnosticism due to the incompatibility with Christian orthodoxy; they also believed that these philosophies were a threat to the unity of the church. Radical mind-body dualism led gnostics not only to teach that the material world and physical body were evil, but also to deny that Jesus came in the flesh, an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. The writings of the early church fathers "judged the deviations and opinions of their opponents from the point of view of a tradition of Christian faith and thought which was considered as firm and certain, and sought to refute them," according to Rudolph.⁴⁰ The early church fathers attempted to correct those who were wrongly interpreting Scripture, teaching heresy, and threatening the unity of the church.

Justin Martyr, an early church father (born in Samaria, educated in Ephesus, and martyred in Rome), explored a variety of philosophies before converting to Christianity. Justin is said to have written the oldest heresiological work, which unfortunately has not survived.⁴¹ He was one of "the first to engage the broader Greco-

⁴⁰Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 10.

⁴¹Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 10.

Roman culture with the Christian message,” according to Litfin.⁴² His writings *First Apology* and *Second Apology* were some of the first in Christian apologetics. Within *First Apology*, Justin sought to address Greco-Roman philosophy and heretics, which he believed operated under demonic influence.⁴³ Justin also addressed the gnostic teachers, Simon Magus, Meander, Marcion, and those who followed their teachings.⁴⁴ He contended that the gods the pagans worshiped were demonic and argued that demons spoke through false teachers, such as Simon Magus and Meander.

An additional concern of the early church fathers was the dualistic foundation that formed the basis of the heretical teachings. Dualism was the lens by which the heretics operated and understood God, Jesus, the universe, and humanity. Based on the theology that he developed which identified “the philosophical Logos as the incarnate Son of God,” Justin argued that Jesus “was the one and only path between spiritual and earthly realms.”⁴⁵ Additionally, Karen L. King argues, “[He believed] the truth of Christianity was demonstrated to the world by showing how the events of Jesus’ life fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture; indeed the truth of Scripture could only be fully illuminated by Christ.”⁴⁶ This was opposed to those who had developed their own interpretations of Scripture or denied that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, which included the gnostics. Justin Martyr and the early church fathers sought to end the propagation of heresy by the gnostics and other false teachers of the time.

Irenaeus of Lyon authored *Against Heresies*, which is “one of the most

⁴²Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 41.

⁴³Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 11.

⁴⁴Walker, *Gnosticism*, 23.

⁴⁵Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 53.

⁴⁶Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 28.

comprehensive and authoritative anti-heretical documents,” according to Rudolph.⁴⁷ Irenaeus recognized the danger in how gnostic leaders and teachers were leading people astray who were initially drawn to Jesus.⁴⁸ In response, he wrote *Against Heresies* “as the Christian answer.”⁴⁹ Irenaeus addressed both major and lesser-known gnostic groups in an attempt to reveal the inconsistencies within the sects, including the Marcionites, Valentinians, and their disciples.⁵⁰ Book 1 of *Against Heresies* addressed disciples of Valentinus, including Ptolemy, as false teachers and promoters of heresy. In Irenaeus’ view, Marcion had attempted to gain followers by explaining that he was higher in status than the apostles by presenting them with Scripture that he had altered. Marcion also falsely taught that salvation did not include the body “since it was taken from the earth.”⁵¹ Through *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus sought to debunk their teachings and demonstrate how the beliefs that they disseminated were contrary to the gospel.

Irenaeus was a voice for an authentic, orthodox understanding of Jesus in a day where many were claiming that he was just another wise figure of his time.⁵² The gnostics claimed that they were the enlightened ones who had achieved true salvation through knowledge as opposed to the Christians and their understanding of salvation by faith in Christ. Irenaeus argued against the gnostics by stating that the true Christian church taught the same doctrines as the apostles, as opposed to the gnostics who taught

⁴⁷Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 11.

⁴⁸Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 69.

⁴⁹Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 69.

⁵⁰Walker, *Gnosticism*, 24.

⁵¹James R. Payton, Jr., *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Pub., 2011), 39.

⁵²Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 62.

their own interpretation of Scripture, which lead to the development of false doctrine.⁵³ The gnostic understanding of Scripture was radically different from the Christian understanding even though the canon was not yet fully developed. Irenaeus appealed to the Rule of Faith as being necessary in distinguishing true doctrine from false teaching. He argued that the use of “cryptic symbolism and arcane codes manifestly was *not* the way the Bible should be interpreted,” which was the way that gnostics developed their understanding of Scripture, according to Litfin.⁵⁴ Rather, believers should use the Rule of Faith to interpret Scripture, which was “a synopsis of the earliest Christian gospel that new converts could easily memorize,” given to them at baptism.⁵⁵ The writings of Irenaeus are considered to be one of the most important sources in gnostic heresiological study.

Similar to Irenaeus, Tertullian, an early church father who was born in Carthage and lived in Rome, wrote against gnostic sects; he also contended with Jews, Docetism, and other heretical teachings.⁵⁶ In his writing *Against the Jews*, he proclaimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy and denounced the Jews for denying that Jesus was the Christ. Tertullian also argued against Docetism, which denied that Jesus existed in a human body. He authored the book *Prescriptions Against Heretics* to refute false teaching by reinforcing the correct way Christians should interpret Scripture. Like Irenaeus, he argued that Christians should utilize the Rule of Faith to discern true doctrine. Tertullian proposed, “Once Christ’s authoritative teachings have

⁵³Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 73.

⁵⁴Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 71.

⁵⁵Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 71.

⁵⁶Walker, *Gnosticism*, 24.

been found, philosophical ‘seeking’ should end, replaced by firm belief.”⁵⁷ Jesus’ teachings delineated truth from falsehood by forming theological boundaries, which Christians are to stay within. Regarding the Rule of Faith based on the teachings of Jesus, Litfin explains, “By laying out the basic framework of salvation history, the rule erected a visible fence that separated those inside the corral from the predators outside with their destructive cosmic myths.”⁵⁸ The gnostics went outside of the basic framework and established their own interpretation of Scripture, which laid the foundation of radical mind-body dualism and the propagation of heresy.

Clement of Alexandria, an early church father from Athens, was considered to be “one of the most educated of all the church fathers and can be regarded as *the* Christian gnostic.”⁵⁹ Christians, including Clement, “had to be very academic to combat the gnostic’s preoccupation with ‘knowledge.’”⁶⁰ The “cerebral and mystical” tone to Clement’s writings was a commonality within Christian theology at Alexandria, which “was characterized by the allegorization of Scripture and the harmonization of biblical ideas with Greek philosophy.”⁶¹ Rudolph explains, “With his conscious use of the concept ‘gnosis’ for the Christian knowledge of truth, Clement once again attempted to overcome the breach between faith and knowledge in the Church and not to remain stuck in a mere denial of the claims of the ‘false’ gnosis.”⁶² In his writings, he aimed to show the true gnosis over the false, or heretical, gnosis.

Origen, an early church father that lived in Alexandria, followed Clement’s

⁵⁷Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 84.

⁵⁸Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 84.

⁵⁹Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 16.

⁶⁰Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 124.

⁶¹Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 124.

⁶²Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 16.

strategy in combating gnostic heresy. The writings of Origen and Clement encompassed the strong Platonic influence within Alexandria. As one of Clement's pupils, Origen addressed false *gnosis* with a similar approach. He was highly critical of Gnosticism, but according to Rudolph, he expressed "ideas which bring him close to the Gnosis which he opposes, such as the high estimate of knowledge over against simple faith or the doctrine of the pre-existent soul, its fall into matter, and its return to God."⁶³ In an attempt to organize Christian doctrine systematically, Origen authored *First Principles*.

Through his writings, he sought to refute gnostic dualism, paganism, and opponents of Christianity, such as Celsus, a Platonist philosopher. Particular viewpoints within his writings were eventually considered unorthodox, but Litfin argues, "To be fair, we must remember that the theological position of the Christian church on these points had not yet been firmly established."⁶⁴ It is important to remember that the early church fathers existed during a time of great persecution with little to no development in writings on Christian orthodoxy. This enabled belief systems like Gnosticism to flourish, but that did not prevent the church fathers from refuting gnostic false teaching and attempting to define orthodox Christian doctrine. Just as compartmentalization—physical and spiritual division—was a threat to the early church, the church today continues to face similar dangers.

Compartmentalization in the Western Church

Various forms of compartmentalization can be observed within the church today, some of which have been associated with Gnosticism and Platonism. Compartmentalization is often associated with prioritization, which further inhibits the

⁶³Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 17.

⁶⁴Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 134.

church from fully embracing a biblical worldview on particular subjects, such as the role of embodiment in the Christian life. An overarching type of compartmentalization that can be observed within the church today is the sacred and secular divide, which tends to view subjects within separate spheres or realms. This type of division neglects to recognize the relationship between the two spheres and how they affect one another.

Nancy Pearcey discusses this type of division and its implications within her book *Total Truth*. She explains,

The first step in forming a Christian worldview is to overcome this sharp divide between “heart” and “brain.” We have to reject the division of life into a sacred realm, limited to things like worship and personal morality, over against a secular realm that includes science, politics, economics, and the rest of the public arena. This dichotomy in our minds is the greatest barrier to liberating the power of the gospel across the whole of culture today.⁶⁵

As a result of this type of divide, the Christian life becomes segmented, which prohibits believers from fully embracing a biblical worldview and all of its implications. Hall and Thoennes argue, “Our Protestant reactions to excesses in the Roman Catholic Church during the time of the Reformation, in which sacred/secular divides predominated, has robbed some of us of embracing the physicality of our faith.”⁶⁶ Therefore, a related form of compartmentalization can be observed in how believers isolate the physical body from the soul in their understanding of the human person; it is as though the body were of the world and not of God, which inherently makes it of less importance than the soul. As a result, spiritual development is often considered part of the sacred realm, which is generally pursued at the sake of the physical body. This physical and spiritual division impacts the church in a variety of ways and is made evident through preaching and

⁶⁵Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 20.

⁶⁶Hall and Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies,” 41.

teaching, discipleship, counseling, practice of the spiritual disciplines, and in other ministries of the church.

Preaching and Teaching

Within the evangelical church, there is a heavy emphasis on the transmission of knowledge through preaching and teaching. Rightfully so, preaching and teaching should proclaim God's Word and educate the church in the gospel and biblical truth. However, the heavy focus on knowledge acquisition can create potential division between the soul and the body. As pastors and teachers seek to share God's Word, they often neglect to recognize that they are engaging with embodied believers, not just minds in need of further education. This disconnect can contribute to compartmentalized living and a disconnect in which believers are unable to recognize how their faith and embodiment intersect and how they are to live out their faith as embodied beings. Similarly, discipleship also emphasizes knowledge and spiritual development by means of understanding, which further contributes to this disconnect.

Discipleship

Believers, as disciples of Christ, seek to grow in their faith and to encourage others in the gospel throughout their faith journey. The discipleship relationship is a means by which this growth in the faith occurs. As believers are involved in discipleship, there is often a focus on the transmission of knowledge, further understanding of God's truth, and how it relates to the Christian life. However, embodiment is generally not an emphasis or even a consideration in the discipleship relationship due to the focus on knowledge and understanding. Just as in preaching and teaching, this emphasis on the mind can often create a compartmentalized view of one's self, the world, and one's faith—resulting in a sacred and secular divide. This has the potential to create a misinformed view of the physical body and a disconnected understanding of how one's faith relates to embodiment.

Discipleship is unique in that it involves an intimate relationship between believers, which allows the gospel and learning about God's Word to be experienced at a more personal level. Therefore, there is a unique opportunity within the discipleship relationship for a fuller understanding of embodiment to be embraced and for the physical and spiritual divide to be mended. The same opportunity for a more holistic understanding of the human person could also be available within the counseling relationship.

Biblical Counseling

Within counseling relationships, the physical and spiritual divide can inherently be emphasized as a result of the counseling process. Of course, the particular counseling approach and methodologies being utilized will either help or hinder counselees in forming a holistic understanding of the human person. Within most biblical counseling approaches, the emphasis is generally on sin and the need for heart change. As a result, the understanding of the human person can become disjointed where the heart is emphasized at the expense of the body and is regarded as separate from it. A holistic understanding of humanity that considers the heart within the context of human embodiment would help bridge the divide between the physical and the spiritual, which can result from an overemphasis on the heart and its need for change.

If one of the aims of biblical counseling is to truly be Christ-centered in its approach, then counselors must consider the ways in which the incarnation and the embodiment of Jesus informs counseling. For example, emotional expression, a related topic within the realm of counseling, should be seen in light of the fact that Jesus experienced emotions. Bob Kellemen and Sam Williams contend, "Rather than seeing emotions as weak and sinful, they can be embraced as gifts from God to be used in loving Him with all our being. . . . Cultivating emotional fluency can be an important step in indwelling all aspects of our embodiment and allowing for more Christ-like

relationships.”⁶⁷ Additionally, the *imago Dei* as it relates to embodiment and how the physical body is impacted by sin should be considered within the counseling context. As believers, “we should be offended and repulsed . . . when God’s image bearers are desecrated—abused, beaten, neglected, discriminated against, and not loved and taken care of as they should be.”⁶⁸ Likewise, counselors should consider how the physical body and care for one’s health is an integral aspect of wellbeing and necessary to the healing process. Each of these considerations involves an understanding that human beings have been created as an embodied people.

Spiritual Disciplines

Likewise, embodiment is a necessary consideration within the practice of the spiritual disciplines, as is the topic of this thesis. Within the church today, the spiritual disciplines are generally considered apart from implications of embodiment. The emphasis is most often placed on spiritual development through the building up of knowledge and the practice of stewardship, fasting, and other means. Hall and Thoennes emphasize how cautiousness should be practiced in how believers approach the spiritual disciplines. Furthermore, they argue that fasting should emphasize how believers experience their embodiment and dependence on God, rather than as a means to “subordinate our bodies to our minds.”⁶⁹ They warn that this can result in self-righteousness. Experiencing the spiritual disciplines apart from a holistic understanding of the human person further contributes to the physical and spiritual divide, which

⁶⁷Bob Kellemen and Sam Williams, “The Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishing, 2013), 118.

⁶⁸Kellemen and Williams, “Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul,” 118.

⁶⁹Hall and Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies,” 42.

prevents believers from fully understanding and experiencing spiritual growth as embodied beings.

Dangers of Compartmentalization

Prioritizing the spiritual leads to a neglect of the physical and results in viewing the human person apart from God's intention. According to Kellemen and Williams, he has "created us to entrust ourselves, body and soul, to his care, to enjoy embodied existence, and to appreciate thankfully every good and perfect gift, and to use the members of our bodies as servants of righteousness (Romans 6:12-13). The body, the flesh, our skin and bones, is God's great gift to us."⁷⁰ The radical mind-body dualism evident in Gnosticism should serve as a warning against viewing the physical body as evil, due to the dangerous repercussions that come as a result of such views. The effects of radical mind-body dualism should also serve as a reminder of the importance inherent in developing a biblical understanding of human embodiment. Some within the church have sought to advocate for importance of embodiment by swinging the pendulum toward an overemphasis on the body, while others have continued to address the spiritual aspect of the person at the expense of the body, sometimes unknowingly. An integrated view of the person based on a biblical understanding of embodiment is necessary in order to remedy the compartmentalization of soul and body by which churches are currently operating today.

Often, believers are deficient in a Christian understanding of embodiment due to a lack of necessary reflection on the subject. This discrepancy may be largely due to the fact that the church primarily focuses on spiritual education and development. Rightfully so, the church should be concerned primarily with the spiritual, but not at the expense of the physical since this denies a basic component of human beings as God has

⁷⁰Kellemen and Williams, "The Spiritual Anatomy of the Soul," 114.

created them. It is often wrongly assumed that believers simply know what to think about embodiment. Hall and Thoennes state, “Automatic ways of living out our embodiment are rarely translated into verbal concepts, so our assumptions about the ways we relate to our bodies are rarely challenged.”⁷¹ A lack of reflection on the role of the body in the Christian life, while primarily focusing on spiritual development can easily give way to compartmentalization of soul and body. The dangers of such compartmentalization are apparent as evidenced in the discussion on the variations of radical mind-body dualism, which can give way to hatred of materialism, as was the case in Gnosticism. A thoroughly developed understanding of human embodiment would enable believers to resist compartmentalization. As a result, it would allow them to operate from a more integrated understanding of the human being—how they have been created by God with both a soul and a body.

Conclusion

Assessing the historical perspectives of Platonic philosophy and Gnosticism in regard to the relationship between the physical body and soul provides insight into the church’s need for a biblical and theological understanding of human embodiment, in order to circumvent the dangers inherent in compartmentalization. Recent developments in the area of human embodiment are highlighting the need to address the human person in an integrated manner. Findings from fields such as neuroscience are highlighting the connections between the mind and the body, while writings on Christian habituation and ritual demonstrate how individuals are addressing the positive aspects of embodiment.⁷² The Christian life is lived through a physical body that engages in habits and rituals,

⁷¹Hall and Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies,” 31.

⁷²For more on the effects of ritual and habituation and its relationship to the physical body, see James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

which contribute to the ongoing process of sanctification in the believer. Christian neuroscience, as it relates to embodiment, is a developing area of research that supports an integrated view of the person.

These areas of research are helpful in demonstrating how the church needs to address the human person from an integrated perspective rather than compartmentalizing soul and body. However, research is ever changing and impermanent, even as it provides a positive contribution to a deeper understanding of what it means to be embodied. The only source of permanent truth is the Word of God, which is why it is important for a Christian understanding of the soul and body to be based on God's revelation in Scripture primarily. Scientific findings and observations of the natural world are of benefit to the believer when it points to God's truth, but it is God's truth that provides the ultimate foundation. This does not neglect the importance of scientific research and its positive contribution, but rather emphasizes the biblical basis that should be foundational in a Christian understanding of embodiment.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The created, and therefore normal, state of human existence is an embodied one. References to embodiment are found throughout the Bible. From the creation of man and woman to the incarnation of Christ, the physical body plays a significant role within the biblical metanarrative. The Old and New Testaments both demonstrate how God uses the whole person as a means to glorify himself. This chapter interacts with selected biblical texts in order to provide a biblical and theological foundation for understanding human embodiment; however, a comprehensive treatment of Scripture is outside the scope of this thesis.

In order to develop a biblical understanding of the physical body, Old Testament and New Testament passages must be examined from a proper hermeneutical perspective. Select Old Testament and New Testament passages that demonstrate the purpose and significance of the physical body are addressed. Regarding the Old Testament, this chapter deals with the creation of man, the *imago Dei*, and related passages from Genesis and the Psalms in order to provide a foundation for a biblical theology of embodiment. The Gospels, the Incarnation of Christ, the Pauline epistles, and the resurrection body are also discussed to demonstrate the significance of the physical body within the New Testament.

Embodiment in the Old Testament

The Old Testament testifies to how humanity has been purposefully created by God as embodied. The creation of man and woman reveals that embodiment is the

normal state of human existence. The Old Testament reveals the significance of the physical body through the creation of man, the *imago Dei*, and certain passages within the wisdom literature.

Creation

The book of Genesis is one of the primary sources contributing to a thorough understanding of embodiment. Genesis can be described as a book of beginnings, which includes how God brought human beings and the rest of creation into existence. J. P. Moreland and David Ciochi note, “From the Christian perspective, the key to understanding the nature and identity of the human being is found in the first chapter of the Bible.”¹ They continue, “It is from this perspective that the most important understanding of our being derives and the most significant dilemma of the non-Christian anthropologies is solved.”² According to Daniel Harlow, the purpose of Genesis “intends primarily to teach theological truths about God, the world, and the human race “[It] attests solemnly that God created everything there is, that everything God has created is good, and that humanity represents the pinnacle of God’s creation.”³ To reiterate the importance of Genesis in understanding human embodiment, Pope John Paul II argues, “The first chapter of Genesis is the basis for a Christian understanding of man—it tells the truth about who we are as human beings. It is of the utmost importance to all theology, especially the theology of the body.”⁴ God has chosen to create human beings in an

¹J. P. Moreland and David M. Ciochi, eds., *Christian Perspectives on Being Human: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Integration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 20.

²Moreland and Ciochi, *Christian Perspectives on Being Human*, 20.

³Daniel C. Harlow, “Creation According to Genesis: Literary Genre, Cultural Context, Theological Truth,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 37, no. 2 (January 2008): 164-65.

⁴*Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body in Simple Language*, vol. 1, *Body and Gift: Reflections on Creation*, ed. and trans. Sam Torode (South Wayne, WI: Philokalia Books, 2003), 4.

embodied state as detailed within the book of Genesis.

Genesis 1:26a states, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’” This is reiterated in Genesis 1:27, which explains, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Genesis reveals that men and women are created in God’s image and likeness. As such, he has created them as embodied beings with unique characteristics that set them apart from other living creatures. God then proclaims that “it was very good”—further distinguishing human beings from the other creatures that he has created (Gen 1:31).

Furthermore, Genesis 2:7 also describes the creation of man: “The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” Genesis 2:7 reveals that God breathed the breath of life into Adam, which gave life to his physical body. God identified the need for a helper for Adam, so God purposed to create a helper for him (Gen 2:18). Genesis 2:21-22 describes how God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs in order to make Eve. Genesis 2:22 explains, “The rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” These passages reveal God’s intentionality in creating man and woman as embodied beings.

Genesis 1:27 utilizes the Hebrew word *bārā* in describing how God created man and woman, while Genesis 2:7 contains the word *yāsar*; John Wilkinson argues that this language “describes the action of God as like that of a potter molding clay.”⁵ God intricately and purposefully created humanity just as a potter does when forming clay. These passages demonstrate how God intricately created the human person in all aspects. Furthermore, God divinely ordained that human beings are to exist as both material and immaterial, which is demonstrated in Genesis 2:7. Moreland and Ciocchi contend,

⁵John Wilkinson, “The Body in the Old Testament,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1991): 198.

“Mankind is created from both ‘the dust of the ground’ and ‘the breath of life’ directly from God.”⁶ Kendra Hotz and Matthew Mathews argue,

Our bodily identity and spiritual identity are integrated and inseparably united. This is no separate thing called a *soul* that God places inside a different, foreign thing called a *body*. Instead, as God’s life-giving breath, soul permeates, saturates, and animates our body. We are ensouled flesh and enfleshed souls—whole selves whose spiritual identity and bodily identity are inextricably interwoven to form the singular fabric of who we are.⁷

Human beings are certainly more than their physical bodies, but “we cannot be who we are apart from being the bodies that we are, and this means that what happens to our bodies affects our identities,” according to Hotz and Mathews.⁸ This is an important consideration: God did not create the human person as a spirit or soul without physical form. Wayne Grudem explains, “When God made us as the pinnacle of his creation, he gave us physical bodies.”⁹ God intentionally created human beings as embodied and all that God does is purposeful and for his glory. Gregg Allison explains, “Human beings are created holistically, so that in this earthly existence, soul and body are an inseparable unity.”¹⁰ Therefore, it is necessary to consider all aspects of the human person, including the physical body, since it is how God chose to create his people.

Imago Dei

Genesis describes how human beings were created in the *imago Dei*, which is a foundational concept within the creation narrative (Gen 1-2). Genesis 1:26-27 reveals

⁶Moreland and Ciocchi, *Christian Perspectives on Being Human*, 21.

⁷Kendra G. Hotz and Matthew T. Mathews, *Dust and Breath: Faith, Health, and Why the Church Should Care About Both* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 3.

⁸Hotz and Mathews, *Dust and Breath*, 9.

⁹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 613.

¹⁰Gregg Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 5.

how God created man and woman in his image—the *imago Dei*. The *imago Dei* is Latin for the image of God and describes “the nature of man such that he is like God and represents God,” according to Grudem.¹¹ The concept of the *imago Dei* first appears in Genesis 1:26-27, but references to human beings being created in the image and likeness of God are seen throughout Scripture. Genesis 5:1 echoes Genesis 1:26-27, describing how God created humanity in his likeness. Genesis 9:6 speaks to the judgment that is placed on one who takes another person’s life because “God has made man in his own image.” These passages within Genesis demonstrate the significance that is inherent in humanity being created in the image of God. Being human and made in the image of God are inseparable realities: “To be human means to be made in the image of God,” states Charles Sherlock.¹² Therefore, the *imago Dei* is a foundational concept.

Addressing the significance of the *imago Dei* for theological anthropology, Nonna Verna Harrison notes, “Throughout the ages, Christians have believed that the image of God in which we are created is at the core of who we are and defines us as human (Gen 1:26-27).”¹⁴ The concept of the *imago Dei* is central in understanding the nature of humanity. James Estep, Jr. contends, “While biblical teaching on humanity includes more than the *imago Dei*, humanity, as God’s image bearers, remains central to the Christian understanding of anthropology.”¹⁵ God created man and woman in his image and said that all that he had created was “very good” (Gen 1:31).

¹¹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1244.

¹²Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 213.

¹⁴Nonna Verna Harrison, *God’s Many-Splendored Image* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 5.

¹⁵James R. Estep, Jr., “Christian Anthropology: Humanity as the *Imago Dei*,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep, Jr. and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Pub., 2010), 11.

God created humanity alone in his image and likeness. Therefore, human beings are of great worth because they are “the creature of God who is created ‘good’ in God’s image and who still bears that image (Gen 1:31),” according to Moreland and Ciocchi.¹⁶ C. John Collins explains, “‘In the image’ and ‘after the likeness’ refer to the same thing with each clarifying the other.”¹⁷ Moses’ use of the words “image” and “likeness” indicate that we represent God and are his image-bearers.¹⁸ Genesis 1:26-27 uses the Hebrew word *zelem*, meaning statue, which is translated to “image”; this implies that human beings are a “markedly concrete, physical representation of the personal creator and one true God,” according to Adam G. Cooper.¹⁹ The Hebrew word for “likeness” is *demuth*, which infers resemblance and gives a fuller understanding of the *imago Dei* when paired with the word “image.”²⁰ Cooper argues, regarding Genesis 1:26-27, “God’s total transcendence is preserved alongside the affirmation of a real, but qualitatively distinct participation in God by human beings, both male and female.”²¹ Being created in both the image and likeness of God has a profound impact on the understanding of human embodiment. Each and every aspect of humanity has been divinely created by God.

As stated in Genesis 1:26-27, God created man and woman in his image as embodied beings. God has chosen to create human beings with unique characteristics and capacities, which is different from how he has created other living creatures. Human

¹⁶Moreland and Ciocchi, *Christian Perspectives on Being Human*, 21.

¹⁷C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2006.), 62.

¹⁸Estep, “Christian Anthropology,” 12.

¹⁹Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

²⁰Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 22.

²¹Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 23.

beings have been created as embodied beings who are called to be God’s image bearers and representatives in the world. They have been called to exercise dominion over all of the earth and to care for the creatures that God has created (Gen 1:26). They have also been called to be fruitful and multiply according to Genesis 1:28. Furthermore, Genesis 2:7 and 2:21-22 also speak to God forming both man and woman physically. Derek Kidner expounds on the idea that being created in the image of God includes both the soul and body of human beings:

When we try to define the image of God, it is not enough to react against a crude literalism by isolating man’s mind and spirit from his body. The Bible makes man a unity: acting, thinking, and feeling with his whole being. This living creature, then, and not some distillation from him is an expression or transcription of the eternal, incorporeal creator in terms of temporal, bodily, creaturely existence.’²²

God has created the human person as an interconnected being with the unified aspects of body and soul. Similarly, Diane Chandler describes the creation of human beings in this way:

The formation of Adam and Eve, created in the image of God as integrated beings, entails a physical body, spiritual endowment, emotions, relational capacity, intelligence, vocational propensity for work, capability for physical health and wellness, and the ability to be stewards of themselves, God’s creation and God-given resources. God did not assemble humankind in piecemeal fashion.²³

Although the creation accounts indicate God’s purposes in creating humanity as embodied, there is still hesitation among modern believers to consider the importance of the physical body—some are even marked by hatred for their bodies. Laura Hendrickson suggests, “The body fares little better, perhaps worse, in our mind’s eye. ‘We’d be better off without it. The flesh is evil,’ we say, not realizing that such thinking smacks of

²²Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 55.

²³Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wellness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 31.

worldly philosophy, not biblical theology.”²⁴ Moving toward an understanding of human embodiment according to Scripture, believers must consider that God holistically created human beings with a soul and a body. A deeper appreciation and understanding of the reality of the *imago Dei* will contribute to a more biblically-informed definition of human embodiment.

Stewardship and the *Imago Dei*

Historically, the Western church has emphasized the significance of biblical stewardship and has often included it as a spiritual discipline. The spiritual disciplines, including stewardship, are a means by which sanctification occurs, in which believers are being transformed into Christ’s likeness. Stewardship is widely discussed throughout Scripture, which in turn has numerous applications for the believer. God chooses to entrust his people with resources and responsibilities to steward well for their good and ultimately for his glory. Genesis 2:15 explains that God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work and keep it. God entrusted Adam to care for the earth as he worked the garden. Adam was entrusted to glorify God in his work and in the stewardship of the resources that God had given to him. Stewardship of responsibilities, such as believers honoring God in their work, and the stewardship of resources, such as time or money, are often regarded with overwhelming acceptance within the church. However, stewardship of one’s health in modern Evangelical contexts is often understated. A believer’s (perhaps subconscious) understanding of human embodiment determines how one views stewardship of their health, if they even consider it to be an aspect of stewardship at all.

Biblical stewardship, however, impacts all areas of life. According to Collins, the “original task was [for human beings] to begin from Eden, work their way outward,

²⁴Laura Hendrickson, “The Complex Mind/Body Connection,” in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God’s Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 2013), 409.

and spread the blessings of Eden to all the earth. This would mean managing all of its creatures and resources for *good* purposes: to allow their beauty to flourish, to use them wisely and kindly, and to promote well-being for all.”²⁵ Being created in the image and likeness of God, human beings are God’s representatives in the world. God ordained for humanity to have dominion over creation with the intention that they would steward their responsibilities and God-given resources well (Gen 1:26); thus, David Atkinson contends that stewardship “cannot therefore be a lordly and exploitative dominion, but a responsible stewardship, a facilitating servanthood, which recognizes that all things derive their existence from God’s hands.”²⁶ This type of dominion extends over God’s creatures and his created realities and involves living out of an embodied state in a God-glorifying manner. Genesis 1:26 does not directly involve stewardship of one’s health, yet the way in which believers interact with God’s creation and whether or not they take the creation mandate seriously has a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of creation and humanity as a whole.²⁷

Human beings are God’s representatives in the world and are called to steward the responsibilities and resources that have been entrusted to them well. Just as the book of Genesis reveals God’s purposes in the creation of man and woman as embodied beings that are created in his image, the Psalms also demonstrate the significance of human embodiment. Through the Psalms, it is evident that God’s hand has been intricately involved in the formation of every human being. Both Genesis and the Psalms demonstrate how God intends for human beings to be regarded in a holistic manner as

²⁵Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 69.

²⁶David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 35.

²⁷The impact of sin can be observed through out Scripture. However, the Fall describes the direct impact that the sin of Adam and Eve had on all of creation. Gen 3:16-24 describes the consequences of the Fall and how it affects the health and wellbeing of all creation, including humanity.

part of their embodied state.

The Psalms

The Psalms speak to the creation of humanity, how God is intricately involved in the formation of human beings, and how worshipping of God involves the whole person. Psalm 139:13–16 demonstrates how God forms people with purpose and intention as they are fearfully and wonderfully made by him. The Psalmist is moved to praise as he reflects on God’s wonderful works and how he has been created by God. The Psalms reveal how God is involved in the formation of the human person, as Psalm 139:13 explains: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” This Scripture demonstrates that God is involved in the intricate details of creating the whole person, as Wilkinson summarizes:

If we now try to sum up the teaching of the Old Testament on the formation of the human body, we may do so in the following terms. Our bodies are God’s creation. They are brought into being by human procreation in which both male and female human beings share. They develop in the maternal womb according to a definite pattern and time-sequence. They begin as an unformed substance, which differentiates as it grows, into the various parts, which form the body. The framework is formed of bone, sinews, muscle and skin, and within this framework the various organs develop and grow.²⁸

Psalm 139:13-16 reveals the intricate details involved in the creation of humanity, which “is reflected in the extraordinary, tiny, detailed form of a baby when it is born.”²⁹ John Goldingay describes how this process “is rather like embroidery” according to the Psalmist.³⁰ The formation of human beings is also an individual process. The fact that “each person is individually woven or plaited by God” demonstrates that “human beings

²⁸Wilkinson, “The Body in the Old Testament,” 202.

²⁹John Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Pub., 2008), 634.

³⁰Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 634.

are set apart; they are distinctive creatures,” Goldingay argues.³¹ This passage reveals how God has created human beings and “makes them great wonders.”³²

Psalms 8 also speaks to the “uniqueness, significance, and place of humanity in creation,” according to Estep.³³ It describes how all of God’s creation reflects his glory. In Psalm 8:3-4, David considers the majesty of all that God has created as he looks to the heavens, which leads him to reflect on God’s care for humanity. David states, “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers . . . what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps 8:3-4). The Psalms reveal how God’s hand is intricately involved in the creation of humanity and his care for his creatures.

God does not create human beings in a haphazard fashion; rather Psalm 8 demonstrates how he creates in a purposeful manner and places them in a particular position among the rest of creation (Ps 8:5-6). Tremper Longman III argues the Psalmist “marvels that God not only pays attention to, but actively cares for, men and women” (Ps 8:4)³⁵; then he questions why this is the case. Commenting on verses 5-8, Longman continues, “The reason why God pays attention to, and cares for, human beings is because of their exalted status within the created order.”³⁶ This exalted status involves being created in the image of God and being crowned with glory and honor (Ps 8:5). Longman explains, “God is glorious, and humanity, as created in the image of God, reflects that glory. It is a derivative glory, analogous to the way in which the moon

³¹Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 634.

³²Goldingay, *Psalms 90-150*, 634.

³³Estep, “Christian Anthropology,” 13.

³⁵Tremper Longman III, *Psalms*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 79.

³⁶Longman, *Psalms*, 81.

reflects the light of the sun.”³⁷ This status also relates to the function of human beings in which God has given them dominion over his creation, with the idea “that humanity would be a benevolent ruler who would care for the rest of creation and be good stewards of it, not despots who would exploit their subjects,” Longman says.³⁸ Human beings, created in the image of God, are crowned in glory and honor by him and are given an exalted status over the rest of creation.

The Psalms also speak to the holistic unity inherent in human beings. In Psalm 63:2-3, David states how his soul thirsts for God and his flesh faints for him; his longing involves the entirety of his being. David is expressing his need for God in a holistic manner, which infers that his existence—both in soul and body—is dependent on God. Willem Van Gemeren notes, “Longing for God consumes the whole being.”³⁹ Therefore, this desire for God that is being expressed physically and spiritually involves David’s entire being in soul and body. As Cooper suggests, “The parallelism does not present us with two separate anthropological categories, one psychic and the other physical.”⁴⁰ David expresses that he will praise God with his mouth, lift up his hands in God’s name, and his soul will be satisfied by God as with rich food (Ps 63:3-5). Psalm 63 reveals that he regards himself as a unified whole that exists in both soul and body as he has been created by God.

Biblical Anthropology in the New Testament

Several passages within the New Testament highlight the significance of the

³⁷Longman, *Psalms*, 81.

³⁸Longman, *Psalms*, 81.

³⁹Willem A. Van Gemeren, *Psalms*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 489.

⁴⁰Cooper, *Life in the Flesh*, 13.

physical body and include points of application for how believers should live in light of their embodiment. Unfortunately, these passages have been largely understated in most church contexts. Believers are often unsure of how to relate to their physical bodies due to a lack of biblical teaching on the subject or based on difficult experiences, such as suffering or trauma involving the body, which can negatively impact their view of it.⁴¹ Scripture “leaves little doubt that whatever concerns our bodies has spiritual significance and ethical implications. Yet the thoroughly incarnational quality of the Christian faith has not always been realized in the church,” according to Albert Meiberg.⁴² The church often appropriately highlights the importance of the physical body in the incarnation of Christ, but fails to address the embodiment of God’s people and how it relates to Jesus coming in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3). As evident in the discussion of Old Testament passages, God intricately and purposely created human beings as embodied people.

The New Testament also recognizes God’s purposes in creating the physical body. The New Testament authors even sought to counter false teaching that viewed the body as evil and of lower priority than the soul, as previously discussed in chapter three. Elizabeth Hall explains, “New Testament writers aggressively combated Gnostic attacks on the body, affirming Old Testament teaching on the goodness of God’s creation, and developing teachings on our eternal embodied state in the resurrection.”⁴³ The New Testament demonstrates that the physical body is an important aspect of God’s creation in numerous ways. New Testament writers speak to the incarnation of Christ because Jesus, himself, existed in bodily form when he came to earth and dwelled among men (John 1:14). In addition to their spiritual health, Jesus cared for the physical bodies of

⁴¹Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment,” 5.

⁴²Albert L. Meiburg, *Sound Body/Sound Mind* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 38.

⁴³M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall, “What are Bodies For? An Integrative Examination of Embodiment,” *Christian Scholar’s Review*, 39 no. 2 (January 2010): 159.

people he encountered in his earthly ministry, which is revealed throughout the Gospels. The Gospel writers include stories of how Jesus healed those who were ailing both physically and spiritually. He also fulfilled the physical hunger of those in need by miraculously feeding the five thousand (Matt 14:13-21). Similarly, Jesus fulfilled the spiritual and physical thirst of the Samaritan woman (John 4:10; 13-14). The New Testament also speaks to the resurrection of Christ, describing how the resurrection of believers will include the physical body (1 Cor 15:35-58). Paul speaks of the physical body throughout his epistles; this includes describing the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, which should be used as an instrument to glorify God (1 Cor 6:19-20).

The Gospels

The Gospels speak to human embodiment on various levels of importance. Most significantly, the Gospels reveal the incarnation of Christ, in which God sent his son, Jesus, to earth to dwell with human beings. The Gospels also demonstrate that Jesus' earthly ministry involved the physical body in a variety of ways, including how he cared for his own physical body and for the bodies of others. The needs or limitations of the physical body were often used to highlight humanity's spiritual needs that could only be fulfilled in Christ. Jesus actively cared for himself not because he was seeking health for health's sake, but because he sought to honor his Father in every decision that he made. Jesus regarded the whole person as significant, which is revealed throughout the Gospels.

The emphasis on healing throughout the Gospels reveals that physical wellbeing was important to Jesus, and also pointed to the true need for spiritual healing that only he could fulfill. Regarding physical healing, Matthew 4:23-24 explains,

And he went throughout all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them.

Physical healing was a significant part of Jesus' ministry on earth. He caused the blind to

see (John 9:6-7), healed the leper (Matt 8:2-3), and healed those with various other physical ailments, including Peter's mother-in-law (Matt 8:14-5), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:41-2), the woman with the bleeding disorder (Mark 5:25-9), and many others. Matthew 8:17 explains that Jesus' healing ministry fulfilled prophecy in Isaiah 53:4: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." Craig Keener argues, "Matthew informs his audience that healing was part of Jesus' mission, which God provided at great cost to Jesus (8:17)."⁴⁴

In the New Testament, healing of the physical body only addressed temporal issues, in the sense that it was meant to point to Jesus and one's eternal need for him. However, Jesus' desire was for people to experience a restoration of embodiment, so that they were also restored to engage and flourish in all realms of life. Those who experienced such renewal of their bodies and livelihood would now not only tell of Jesus and his miraculous healings, but would also witness to the whole person restoration that was only possible through him. Additionally Jesus used physical needs to explain humanity's spiritual lack, which is observed throughout the Gospels, especially within the book of John. In John 4:7-15, Jesus offers the Samaritan woman a drink of the living water and explains that if she drinks of such water that she will never be thirsty again. This pointed to her spiritual need for Jesus, himself. Furthermore, John 6:1-15 describes how Jesus miraculously provided enough fish and bread to feed the crowd of five thousand people. As a result, Jesus describes himself as the bread of life that satisfies the spiritual hunger of man. He explains, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). As he was moved by compassion for others, Jesus used his ministry as a means to explain the ultimate spiritual need from which humanity could only find true healing and provision in him.

⁴⁴Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 273.

Scripture notes that Jesus was moved by compassion in seeing the needs of others (Matt 9:36; Luke 7:13).⁴⁵ Jesus cared for the physical body and sought to bring healing to those who were suffering and vulnerable as a result of their ailments. Jan-Olav Henriksen and Karl Olav Sandnes note, “Jesus mentions the vulnerability of the sick in Matthew 25:36 (‘I was sick and you took care of me’). Limited access to worship in the temple, loss of work and income, and social stigmatization – all are involved.”⁴⁶ Within the Gospels, Henriksen and Sandnes contend, “The healing stories are comprehensive in their view on human beings”⁴⁷; Jesus sought the full restoration of those who were suffering. Jesus cared for the needs of others, their afflictions, and how such ailments impacted their lives.

The Incarnation of Christ

The New Testament speaks to the incarnation in revealing how the Son came to earth to live among human beings. In the incarnation, the eternal Son took on the fullness of human nature. In the doctrine of the incarnation, Jesus is both fully God and fully man. Philippians 2:6-8 explains, “[W]ho, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Furthermore, John 1:14 describes how the Word is God the Son who became flesh. John 1:14 states, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Referring to John

⁴⁵Jan-Olav Henriksen and Karl Olav Sandnes, *Jesus as Healer: A Gospel for the Body* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 71.

⁴⁶Henriksen and Sandnes, *Jesus as Healer*, 71.

⁴⁷Henriksen and Sandnes, *Jesus as Healer*, 71.

1:14, Darrell Bock explains, “For John, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was sent to take on flesh and reveal the Father, his way and will. In sum, the Word was God now come in the flesh.”⁴⁹ The incarnation is a foundational doctrine in the Christian faith that also plays an important role in the understanding of human embodiment. For the purpose of this thesis, the role of the incarnation in relation to human embodiment will be primarily discussed.

Through the incarnation, Jesus was able to experience being in an embodied state and all that is involved in being human, other than succumbing to sin. Jesus, “the central figure of our faith, is One whom God sent into the world in a human body. The Gospels make it clear that though he was the Son of God, Jesus knew both the joys and the sorrows of a human,” notes Meiburg.⁵⁰ Jesus was fully God, yet fully man and experienced all that it means to be human, but he did not give way to sin. Robert Letham posits, “Jesus’ humanity is real and genuine.”⁵¹ This is revealed throughout Scripture. The Gospels explain that Jesus knew fatigue, hunger, thirst, sadness and grief, and that he experienced growth and development as he grew from infancy to adulthood (Luke 2:40-52; Matt 4:1-2, 8:24; John 4:4-7, 11:32-38, 19:28).⁵²

The work that the Son accomplishes through becoming human in the incarnation is threefold, according to Harrison: “First, it is a *repetition* of the creation of humankind—a new beginning—in which Christ is the new Adam. Second, it is a *reversal* of what went wrong in the fall. Third, it is a *summation* of all human history throughout

⁴⁹Darrell Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 417.

⁵⁰Meiburg, *Sound Body/Sound Mind*, 38.

⁵¹Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2011), 20.

⁵²Letham, *Union with Christ*, 19-20.

the world so that all people can be united with Christ in a new humankind.”⁵³ Scripture reveals that the incarnation of Christ and what he accomplished through becoming human are essential in the doctrines of salvation and sanctification. The relationship between Jesus and what he accomplished can be understood as such: “In Adam, the first-formed man with whom we are united at the outset, we all die; but if we unite ourselves to Christ and die in him, we will also rise with him. When he becomes incarnate, the Lord shares our flesh, and . . . this shared flesh is what unites him with all people and enables the resurrection of his flesh to spread to others,” according to Harrison.⁵⁴ The incarnation of Christ is a foundational aspect of the Gospel and in understanding human embodiment. Human beings identify with Christ in his sufferings, death, and resurrection, which Paul discusses at length within his epistles.

Pauline Epistles

Paul speaks of human embodiment throughout his letters, and the significance of the physical body is revealed in a variety of ways. According to Meiburg, “The body of Christ on the cross . . . is means of salvation. In baptism we are welcomed into his body, the church, where we share his body in the observance of Communion. Our ‘reasonable service’ to God is to offer our bodies, ‘a living sacrifice’ (Rom 12:1, KJV). Finally, in the resurrection, ‘we shall all be changed’ into the likeness of ‘his glorious body’ (1 Cor 15:51; Phil 3:21, KJV).”⁵⁵ Paul argues for the “continuity between the body of the present life and the body of the life to come,” according to Charles Kingsley

⁵³Harrison, *God’s Many Splendored Image*, 41.

⁵⁴Harrison, *God’s Many Splendored Image*, 41.

⁵⁵Meiburg, *Sound Body/Sound Mind*, 39.

Barrett⁵⁶; thus the physical body is not only relevant in the present moment, but it is also important in the future resurrection of believers.

Scripture teaches that believers should see their bodies as belonging to God, which he has entrusted to their care. Paul turns his attention to the physical body of the believer in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 where he states, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” The individual physical bodies of believers are important and intimately connected to Christ. According to Mark Taylor, Paul’s focus in 1 Corinthians 6:19 “is on the believer’s individual body, though incorporated into Christ’s body.”⁵⁸ Paul asserts believers should honor God with their physical bodies because they belong to Christ. Believers are united with Christ, which is why Paul reminds the Corinthians that their bodies are members of Him (1 Cor 6:15).

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul is specifically speaking about abstaining from sexually immoral practices that were prevalent within the city of Corinth. 1 Corinthians 6:13a states, “‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food’—and God will destroy both one and the other.” This provides insight into the Corinthians view of the body and Paul’s response. Taylor explains, “It is commonly argued that the Corinthians believed that sexual activity was a mere bodily function like eating food, which led to the conclusion that normal bodily functions have no abiding significance and are therefore of no ultimate consequence.”⁵⁹ However, this was a misinformed view that needed

⁵⁶Charles Kingsley Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 20.

⁵⁸Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H Pub., 2014), 21.

⁵⁹Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 18.

correction “in light of Jesus’ resurrection and the destiny of the believer’s body.”⁶⁰ Paul reveals that the physical body is of eternal significance, as it exists for the Lord (1 Cor 6:13b). 1 Corinthians 6:13b states, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”

The correspondence between food, the stomach, and destruction is important to note, as well as the relationship between the Lord and the body. “Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food, and the end of both is destruction,” Leon Morris argues, “The body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body, and resurrection is the destiny of both.”⁶¹ Paul explains that the body was created for the Lord “in order to become a member of Christ who lived and died in order to redeem it.”⁶² As Taylor continues, “Jesus has as his purpose and destiny to dwell in and glorify the body (Rom 8:23) that is united to him through the Spirit (6:17).”⁶³ Paul counters the Corinthians’ belief that the body was expendable, as it is a member of Christ and will be raised by God (1 Cor 6:14-15).

Paul further explains how sexual immorality dishonors God and is considered a sin against one’s own body (1 Cor 6:18). Therefore, he exhorts the Corinthians to glorify God in their bodies by abstaining from sexual sin (v. 20). In *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II explains,

Paul ends his argument in 1 Corinthians with a significant exhortation: ‘Therefore glorify God in your body’ (v. 20). Purity as a virtue or ability of ‘keeping one’s own body with holiness and reverence,’ allied with the gift of piety as a fruit of the Holy Spirit’s dwelling in the ‘temple’ of the body, causes in the body such a fullness of dignity in interpersonal relations that *God himself is glorified*.⁶⁴

⁶⁰Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 18.

⁶¹Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 22.

⁶²Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 19.

⁶³Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 19.

⁶⁴This is not an endorsement of Roman Catholic teaching; however, Roman Catholics have

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to honor God in their physical bodies because how the body is regarded and treated affects believers individually and impacts Christ's body, which is the church. Chandler says, "Because the body's purpose is to honor and glorify God, cultivating sexual purity becomes part of the discipleship process as believers respond to the radical call to follow Christ and his ways."⁶⁵ Referencing 1 Corinthians 6:13-20, Taylor states,

The sanctity of the body is the key teaching of the passage as set forth through a number of positive affirmations: (1) The body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body (6:13b). (2) The body is destined for resurrection through God's power (6:14). (3) The body is a member of Christ (6:15). (4) The one who is joined to the Lord is "one with him in spirit" (6:17). (5) The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19). (6) Christians must honor God with their bodies because they have been bought at a price (6:20). In sum, the theme of God's ownership of our bodies and the relational nature of embodied, physical existence, whereby we bring either shame or glory to God, dominates this passage.⁶⁶

Based on this biblical affirmation, it is evident that God considers the physical body as significant, calling believers to glorify him in their bodies, especially regarding purity and abstaining from sexual immorality. First Corinthians 6:19-20 demonstrates that a believer's body is sacred and a temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore, believers are commanded to honor God with their body as his temple.

Romans 12:1-2 has numerous implications in the life of a believer for both the body and the mind. Regarding honoring God with one's body and mind, Paul states the following:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

written more on the topic of embodiment, which is why this work is included. John Paul II, *Man and Women He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 353.

⁶⁵Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 210.

⁶⁶Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 17.

Paul demonstrates that it is necessary for believers to honor God in how they live as embodied people, which involves the whole person. Robert Gundry asserts, “‘Bodies’ and ‘mind’ stand distinct from each other but in complementary fashion: ‘present your bodies’— the outer part of your constitution, the physical means of your activity in the material environment; ‘be transformed by the renewal of your mind’ – the inner part of your constitution where thinking, feeling, and willing take place.”⁶⁷ Believers are called to offer their whole being as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. Robert Mounce notes, “In view of God’s act of mercy, it is entirely fitting that we commit ourselves without reservation to him.”⁶⁸ Paul also exhorts believers to be transformed in the renewing of their minds and admonishes them not to be held captive by the world. Gundry continues, “[In] Romans 12:1 Paul singles out the physical body for consecration to God, and in Romans 12:2 singles out the mind for divine renewal.”⁶⁹

Therefore, it is also important for believers to think and act biblically in regard to both the mind and the body rather than falling into the patterns of this world, as Romans 12:2 describes. Believers are to commit themselves entirely to God: “The church should stand out from the world as a demonstration of God’s intention for the human race,” Mounce argues.⁷⁰ Believers are called to glorify God with their whole being, which includes how they live on a practical level. In reference to what he describes as the “‘practical’ section of Romans,” Mounce explains, “The practical, however, must of

⁶⁷Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987), 35.

⁶⁸Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 232.

⁶⁹Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology*, 36.

⁷⁰Mounce, *Romans*, 232.

necessity rest upon a solid theological foundation.”⁷¹ Therefore, a proper theology of embodiment considers the whole person as important and valuable as demonstrated in Scripture, because this is how God created humanity.

As an aspect of embodiment, Paul remarks on bodily training in 1 Timothy 4:7-8: “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” Paul utilizes the metaphor of athletic training to demonstrate how believers should dedicate themselves to spiritual development just as an athlete trains for their respective sport. Believers should train themselves in the spiritual disciplines, which have benefit and hold promise, as Paul states, in both the present time and in the future life to come (1Tim 4:8). In addition to spiritual training in godliness, Paul notes that physical training is of some value as well (1 Tim 4:8). Allison expounds,

Paul urges his disciples to focus on training in godliness, which would include study of Scripture, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines. Pausing for a moment on actual athletic training, he comments that physical discipline is nonetheless important. Certainly, it does not hold promise for life to come, but bodily training has value for embodied human beings during their earthly existence.⁷²

Paul explains that there is value in physical training for the believer, as it benefits the body, which belongs to God. Therefore, he is glorified as believers honor him with their whole being. According to Paul, believers must consider their spiritual health as most important, but this reality does not forsake physical health. Paul reveals how honoring God with one’s body is of measurable importance, as he reiterates in Romans 12:1-2.

The Resurrection Body

First Corinthians 15 provides one of the most significant passages on the

⁷¹Mounce, *Romans*, 230.

⁷²Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment,” 7.

resurrection within all of Scripture. As previously discussed in chapter 3, Docetists denied the bodily resurrection of Christ, as they developed a divide between the soul and the body that led to believing that material creation was evil and irredeemable. Throughout his epistles, Paul paints a much different picture of God's purposes in embodiment, which includes the goodness inherent in material creation and how it will be redeemed when Christ returns.

On the day of Christ's return, believers who have passed away will be raised from the dead and will experience the resurrection of their bodies and all believers—both deceased and living—will experience glorification of their bodies (1 Cor 15:50-53). According to Scripture, the physical bodies of believers will be made new as a result of final glorification in Christ and will be characterized as “imperishable, glorious, powerful, and dominated by the spirit (1 Cor 15:42-44; Phil 3:20-21; Rom 8:11).”⁷³ In 1 John 3:2, John explains that believers will be made like Christ when he returns. John states, “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). John further describes how Jesus existed in a physical body and was resurrected, which gives insight into the embodied state that human beings experience and also gives insight into the resurrection of believers that is to come.

In 1 Corinthians 15:38-40, Paul teaches that the bodies of believers will be buried upon death, but will be raised as spiritual bodies that will be empowered by the Holy Spirit in the resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-44). Grudem describes the significance of the resurrection body in relation to the goodness of creation, when he states, “The physical resurrection of Jesus, and his eternal possession of a physical resurrection body, give clear affirmation of the goodness of the material creation that God originally made: ‘And

⁷³Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment,” 13.

God saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good (Gen 1:13).”⁷⁵

Scripture testifies to the goodness of God’s creation, which sin has negatively impacted in this present age; however, the presence of sin does not make God’s creation, such as the physical body, evil. When Christ returns, all will be made new and the reality of sin will no longer exist. At that time, the physical body will also be made new. J. Patout Burns explains, “Human beings were originally created in a bodily condition and will attain the perfection of that condition in the eschatological restoration and renewal of the whole creation in Christ. The imperfection of the present condition indicates neither a failure of divine power over matter nor a lack of divine love for humanity.”⁷⁶ In the resurrection and glorification of the body, the goodness of God’s creation is exemplified and brought to fruition. As Philippians 3:20-21 describes, the citizenship of the believer who awaits Christ’s return is in heaven, where all will be made new. In the return of Christ, he “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3:21).

Paul provides further insight into human embodiment and the state of the body after death in 2 Corinthians 5:1-9. Paul’s context for writing concerned “the effects of persecution and suffering” as seen in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.⁷⁸ In 2 Corinthians 5:1, Paul refers to the physical body of a believer as a tent, which is the earthly home. However, he explains that a building from God that is “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” will be replace the “tent” if it is destroyed on earth (2 Cor 5:1). Paul explains that believers long for the resurrection of their bodies in which they will be further clothed rather than being found “naked,” or “unclothed,” which refers to the intermediate state in

⁷⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 613.

⁷⁶J. Patout Burns, *Theological Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 2.

⁷⁸Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2015), 154.

which believers are with Christ in a disembodied state (2 Cor 5:2-4). Allison asserts,

For those who have died as Christ-followers, who exist as disembodied believers in heaven with the Lord (2 Cor 5:1-9), the return of Christ will result in the resurrection of their bodies. They will be re-embodied with glorious, new bodies. For those who are still alive at the second advent, who are embodied Christ-followers on earth at that time, the return of Christ will result in their bodies being instantaneously changed into glorified bodies. In both cases, these resurrected and glorified bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and dominated by the Spirit (1 Cor 15:42-44; Phil 3:20-21; Rom 8:11).⁸⁰

Paul assures believers of these realities, as it is according to God's plan and the Spirit has been given to them as a guarantee, which brings comfort and courage as believers walk by faith (2 Cor 5:5-6). Kruse explains, "Although the apostle groans, being burdened by sufferings and persecutions, which afflict him while he remains in his present body, he does not therefore seek to escape into a permanent disembodied state. He longs for a new and better embodiment."⁸¹ The ultimate desire of believers, Paul included, is to be present with the Lord, which means that they would be away from their earthly bodies.

Conversely, to be present in the body means to be away from the Lord—yet their ultimate aim is to please him whether they are "at home or away" (2 Cor 5:6-9).

Conclusion

Colossians 3:17 exhorts, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Paul reminds believers in the church at Colossae that they should glorify God in all that they say and do. What appears to be a simple reminder has profound implications for how believers live as embodied beings. For human beings, life is experienced in an embodied state and words and deeds, or behaviors, are a result of embodiment. Scripture

⁸⁰Allison, "Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment," 13.

⁸¹Kruse further explains how Paul's emphasis on the hope inherent in the permanent embodiment of resurrected believers may have been "intended to counteract dualistic tendencies of some in Corinth who denied the resurrection of the body." For further clarification, see Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 156-57.

demonstrates that the physical body is an integral part of God’s creation, which he called “very good” (Gen 1:31). The incarnation of Christ reveals that the human body was a pivotal aspect of the gospel, in that Jesus came to earth in a body, died a physical death, was resurrected, and reappeared on earth in his resurrected body (1 Cor 15:3-7). During his earthly ministry, Jesus cared for the physical bodies of those he encountered and pointed them to their ultimate need for salvation, which could only be found in him. When Christ returns, believers will be made like him (1 John 3:2). Those who have passed away will experience a bodily resurrection and those who are still living will receive glorified bodies. As Allison contends, “Thus, as fallen and sinful, human beings are called to salvation through Christ, and they are not just ‘souls to be saved’; the human body is included in this divine work. Indeed, ‘the Lord is for the body’ (1 Cor 6:13) in that his completed work of salvation will include bodily resurrection.”⁸² Human beings are not just souls in need of salvation. Humanity exists in a physical body according to God’s design. Therefore, believers should glorify God both in word and deed as embodied beings (Col 3:17).

⁸²Allison, “Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment,” 13.

CHAPTER 5
IMPLICATIONS FROM CHRISTOCENTRICITY
AND HUMAN EMBODIMENT FOR
SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Scripture demonstrates the significance of human embodiment and reveals how God created the whole person for his glory. As previously discussed, dualism advocates for a compartmentalized view of humanity while a holistic approach advocates for an integrative understanding and recognizes the significance of the whole person in the Christian life. A theologically-informed understanding of human embodiment provides a necessary foundation for how the physical body relates to Christian spiritual formation. These considerations reveal the need for a holistic approach to spiritual formation that rightly considers the implications of human embodiment and the *imago Dei* with an emphasis on Christocentricity in design and practice.

**Toward a New Model of
Spiritual Formation**

Spiritual formation involves the process of sanctification in which believers are becoming more like Christ. Robert Letham states, “Creation was made *in Christ* All things were created and are sustained *for Christ*. The reason the universe exists is for the glory of Christ, the Son of God. The goal toward which it is heading is conformity to him.”¹ As a result, Christ should be central in models of spiritual formation. In Christ, all things are held together and are sustained by him, which is for his glory (Col 1:16-17). As opposed to dualism or compartmentalization, Kenneth Boa claims, “Holistic spirituality

¹Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2011), 13.

stresses the centrality of Christ and his relevance to every component of our lives.”²

While many approaches to spiritual formation exist, it is apparent that some focus on Christ as central and others do not. The intention of this thesis is not to be an exhaustive treatment of each spiritual formation approach, but rather to provide an overview that demonstrates how holistic approaches to spiritual formation are necessary. One that considers both the spiritual and physical dimensions of the human person and is centered on the person and work of Christ is necessary.

Diane Chandler’s book *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness*, is a significant contribution to the field of spiritual formation. The Christian spiritual formation model that she presents is holistic in its approach and advocates for how spiritual development relates to all of life’s dimensions, including areas that are often under-addressed within spiritual formation literature, such as physical health and wellness, resource stewardship, and other topics. Underlying her approach is a biblical understanding of human embodiment in which she helpfully emphasizes the role of the physical body in spiritual formation, which is often understated in the related literature. Her approach rightly considers the relationship between human embodiment and spiritual formation while also adequately integrating the various dimensions of the human person.

The *imago Dei* is central to Chandler’s model. She explains, “[T]he origin of Christian spiritual formation derives from God’s making humans in the *imago Dei*, followed by Christ’s redeeming work on the cross as the ultimate expression of love for fallen humanity and the Holy Spirit’s ongoing empowerment to live a godly life.”³ She

²Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 202.

³Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wellness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 29.

illustrates how the creation narrative relates to formation and utilizes four perspectives on the *imago Dei* to display how the image of God relates to humanity's various dimensions. She states, "The *imago Dei* reflects humankind's capacity for (1) thinking and reasoning, (2) interpersonal relationships, (3) dominion of the earth, and (4) becoming further restored into God's image through the sanctification process as not only a present reality, but also a divine goal and destiny."⁴ Then, she relates these capacities to seven human dimensions: spiritual, emotional, relational, intellectual, vocational, physical health and wellness, and resource stewardship.⁵

Regarding the *imago Dei*, Chandler states, "Human beings are made according to the image, and only Christ is the Image in an absolute sense; he is the model according to which we were made in the beginning. So once the image in us has been covered with dirt by the fall, only he can restore it."⁶ As previously mentioned, Chandler's reasoning for placing the *imago Dei* at the center of her spiritual formation model is understandable, as she connects the four perspectives on the *imago Dei* to the various dimensions of the human person. However, this thesis argues that Chandler's model could be enhanced by making Christ himself, rather than the *imago Dei*, central to the model. This would not only provide clarity, but would more appropriately communicate the necessity of Christocentricity in spiritual formation.

A Christocentric Corrective

A Christocentric model of spiritual formation recognizes Christ as being central in the spiritual development of believers and the foundation on which a believer's life is

⁴Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 32-33.

⁵Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 32.

⁶Nonna Verna Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 39.

built. Growing in Christian maturity means growing “in greater likeness to God.”⁷ Letham states, “More particularly, we grow in likeness to Christ in our lives and in our character. In fact, the goal for which God has redeemed us is that we might be ‘conformed to the image of his Son’ (Rom 8:29) and thus be exactly like Christ in our moral character.”⁸ Believers exist for the glory of God and are being sustained by Christ. God’s purposes are for his people to become more like his Son, so believers glorify God as they orient their lives around Christ.

Believers should be striving towards Christlikeness throughout their lives. According to Robert Cheong and Heath Lambert, Scripture describes the process of becoming more like Christ in a variety of ways: “As training (1 Tim 2:7-8), discipline (1 Cor 9:27), walking (Gal 5:16, 22-24), maturing (Col 1:28), and transforming (2 Cor 3:18), just to name a few.”⁹ In John 15:1-11, Jesus explains how believers are to abide in him because they will not bear fruit apart from an ongoing relationship with him, the vine and source of life.¹⁰ Cheong and Lambert argue that John 15:1-11 “is about spiritual formation that comes through a vital, life-giving union with the Son of God.”¹¹

Furthermore, in a Christocentric model, “every facet of life is centered around Christ as the unifying point of integration and coherence.”¹² As Christ is central, he infiltrates every aspect of the believer’s life, which encourages integration of life’s

⁷Letham, *Union with Christ*, 13

⁸Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 445.

⁹Robert Cheong and Heath Lambert, “The Goal and Focus of Spiritual Formation,” in *Christ Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 2013), 287.

¹⁰Cheong and Lambert, “The Goal and Focus of Spiritual Formation,” 288.

¹¹Cheong and Lambert, “The Goal and Focus of Spiritual Formation,” 288.

¹²Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 222.

dimensions rather than compartmentalization. As a result, Christ “becomes relevant to every part of life and empowers us to live before God in our work, family, and other activities.”¹³ As a result, Boa concludes, “There is no distinction between the spiritual and secular; all things are done for him and through him (Rom 11:36; Phil 4:13).”¹⁴ A Christocentric approach to spiritual formation considers the implications of the *imago Dei* and human embodiment as they relate to the spiritual development of believers.

Integration of Human Embodiment in Spiritual Formation

The soul is often viewed as the only means by which spiritual formation occurs; however, since God created human beings as an embodied people, further attention is needed regarding the role of the physical body in spiritual formation.¹⁵ M. Elizabeth Hall and Erik Thoennes argue, “Combined evidence from the social sciences and the incarnation suggests that a right relationship with our bodies is one in which we experience psychosomatic unity, rather than a feeling of alienation from our bodies.”¹⁶ Through the body, believers live in relationship to God, themselves, and others. The spiritual disciplines are practiced by means of the physical body and believers experience joy, pain, pleasure, suffering, and a plethora of other experiences in a holistic way.¹⁷ It is vital to consider how embodiment relates to spiritual formation.

It is imperative to think biblically about what constitutes the human person, which is revealed throughout Scripture. Humanity has been holistically created in soul

¹³Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 222.

¹⁴Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 222.

¹⁵As a reminder, a fuller treatment of the content in this section can be found in chap. 2.

¹⁶M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall and Erik Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies: Implications of the Incarnation for Embodiment and Christian Higher Education,” in *Christian Scholar’s Review* 36, no. 1 (October 2006), 43.

¹⁷Hall and Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies,” 43.

and body as part of God’s design. Speaking individually to the soul and body of human beings does not infer dualism, but recognizes that these are the physical and spiritual dimensions that contribute to the holistic understanding of the human person. As discussed in chapter 2, ancient Greek philosophers and other religious systems, such as Gnosticism, sought to elevate the soul above the body or even to demonize the body. However, the Christian response should be to argue for the importance and integration of the whole person.

God’s Word demonstrates that these two aspects of the human person, the soul and the body, cannot be regarded as separate, unrelated entities, but must be considered as part of the whole as discussed in chapter 4. Integration, not compartmentalization, is the viewpoint from which believers must operate because spiritual formation affects all aspects of life. As is argued throughout this thesis, a holistic understanding of the human person is integral in Christian spiritual formation. An exhaustive treatment of the soul and body is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a brief discussion is necessary in order to set the foundation for how human embodiment affects spiritual formation.

Scripture testifies to the distinct material and immaterial parts of humanity, as Paul addresses in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. In this passage, he states, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.” According to this passage, sanctification affects humanity in a holistic manner, as the whole person is being sanctified, not just the soul. James Estep, Jr. argues, “Christian anthropology affirms that humanity’s constitution is both physical and nonphysical—not one or the other. Humans cannot be reduced to either physical *or* nonphysical; we are inseparably both Hence, Christian theology views humanity holistically as material and immaterial, body and soul-spirit—not one or the other.”¹⁸ Therefore, Christian spiritual formation involves the

¹⁸James R. Estep, Jr., “Christian Anthropology: Humanity as the Imago Dei,” in *Christian*

whole person, not simply the soul or spirit. Warren Brown and Brad Strawn contend,

In the predominant modern view of spirituality neither one's physical body, nor other persons, nor church communities, are relevant. Spirituality is both disembodied (that is, manifest in the inner state of the soul, which we experience as emotions and feelings) and disembedded (an entirely individual state not directly relevant to any other person). Spirituality is an inner reality – one that is only distantly related to ourselves as physical/social beings, or to the nature of our relationships with other people or communities.¹⁹

Believers are not simply souls that are being spiritually formed. Human beings exist within a physical body where the soul and body constitute the whole person. Neglect of the body within the models of spiritual formation can create dangerous forms of prioritization and compartmentalization, which makes it impossible to apply the gospel to every aspect of life.

Life Dimensions and Implications from Human Embodiment

This thesis proposes an approach towards a Christocentric model of spiritual formation that is holistic in design and demonstrates how formation occurs in a multidimensional way—spiritual, physical, relational, mental, and emotional—according to how God has created his people.²⁰ These dimensions relate to specific aspects in which believers are like God, as they are created in the *imago Dei*. These aspects, or dimensions, within holistic spiritual formation models should not be regarded as separate from one another; instead, they should be viewed as integrative, relating to each

Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development, ed. James R. Estep, Jr. and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H Pub., 2010), 30.

¹⁹Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of the Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4.

²⁰Several resources influenced the selection of these dimensions: Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*; and Gregg Allison, "Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 4-17.

dimension as it contributes to the whole. This section briefly addresses how formation occurs in each of these dimensions. Particular attention is given to how embodiment relates to each of these dimensions and how it contributes to the spiritual formation of believers. Whole person formation towards Christlikeness is the goal of this holistic model of Christ-centered spiritual formation.

Spiritual Dimension

Spiritual formation affects the whole person, including the spiritual dimension, which “. . . concerns the work of the Holy Spirit in conforming believers into the image of Jesus in order to love God and others and reflect Christ’s character in the world.”²¹ As Christ lives within believers, they are called to live by faith in him (Gal 2:20) as they are continually being transformed into Christlikeness through the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). Additional means by which formation occurs within the spiritual dimension include practice of the spiritual disciplines and suffering as a means of formation.

Formation through spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines “are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times,” according to Donald Whitney.²² A distinction must be made, however, between formation and the practice of spiritual disciplines. Cheong and Lambert assert,

[When] Christians talk about spiritual formation, they are [often] talking about what are called the spiritual disciplines—journaling, fasting, solitude, prayer, Bible reading, and other similar activities A conversation about such disciplines is important. Such a discussion, however, can sometimes lose sight of the fact that those disciplines are not goals in and of themselves.²³

²¹Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 68.

²²Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2014), 17.

²³Cheong and Lambert, “The Goal and Focus of Spiritual Formation,” 286-87.

Christ is central in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and growing in Christlikeness is the goal of spiritual formation.

The spiritual disciplines are accomplished by means of the body, which reveals the significance of embodiment in a believer's spiritual development. Physically speaking, the body is inescapably involved in the spiritual disciplines, whether one participates in prayer, fasting, evangelism, or any other practice. Reflection on the role of the body in making the spiritual disciplines possible would be a helpful movement towards engaging the whole person as God has intended.

For example, prayer is communication with God that is used to form his people spiritually. Prayer is a means of spiritual formation and is accomplished by the means of the whole person, which involves the body in specific ways. In prayer, believers communicate with God, which involves both the process of speaking and listening. As Evan Howard reflects, "Prayer is communication between created and creator, between saved and Savior."²⁴ As believers pray, they enter into communication with God that involves adoration, thanksgiving, confession, petition, intercession, and other means. Believers are involved in expressing their prayers either vocally, by means of the voice, or silently through their thoughts. Prayer also involves "just learning to be there, sincerely before God, presenting our bodies before God with a positive intention."²⁵ In prayer, believers become more closely formed to a biblical understanding of God's truth as they recite truths about him, reorient their minds and thoughts towards him, and refocus their efforts on his efforts. Believers can pray standing, kneeling, or sitting with their positions, at time, expressing their posture before God. As Howard explains,

Prayer is a celebration of the risen Christ, and I can communicate this with raised hands and a loud voice. Prayer is devotion to the Almighty, and I can communicate

²⁴Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 129.

²⁵Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 131.

this through lying down flat on my face. Scripture tells us of people lifting hands and eyes, sitting, kneeling, standing, bowing, prostrating, dancing, and beating their breast, all in the act of prayer. Some like to walk and pray or to work and pray. While it may seem like a small thing to change our pose, for some people, just experimenting with different uses of our bodies for prayer can open up new vistas of communication.²⁶

Serving is a spiritual discipline that can be observed throughout Scripture, as believers are called to serve the Lord and one another (Gal 5:13). Regarding the act of serving, Whitney notes, “. . . those who want to train themselves in Christlike spirituality will find it one of the surest and most practical means of growth in grace.”²⁷ Believers are transformed into Christlikeness as they serve. A believer’s acts of service, which are accomplished by means of the whole person, are to be motivated by obedience, gratitude, gladness, forgiveness, humility, and love.²⁸ The physical body is one of the means that makes the act of serving possible as the whole person is involved in serving. Whether believers are serving their neighbor, the local church, the poor and marginalized, or in another capacity, they do so through prayer, presence, labor, or various other means, which involves the whole person.

Regular study of the Bible is another key spiritual discipline that enables believers to grow in Christlikeness. As is the case with prayer, service, and each of the other disciplines, they involve the whole person and specifically able to be accomplished through the physical body. Believers read God’s Word with the eyes or through the process of speaking, listen to it being read with the ears, and understand what is being read or heard by the means of the mind. Believers are able to meditate on God’s Word or memorize Scripture by means of the mind as well. Additionally, believers are then able to apply the Word in their thoughts and through their actions, which is made possible by means of the whole person, including the physical body.

²⁶Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 134.

²⁷Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 117.

²⁸Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 118-23.

In a culture that values instant gratification, practice of the disciplines is often viewed as rote ritualism.²⁹ Some embrace spiritual disciplines, but with the motive of doing good works rather than as a means of glorifying God and growing in Christlikeness. As Whitney describes, “[T]he spiritual disciplines are those personal and interpersonal activities given by God in the Bible as the sufficient means believers in Jesus Christ are to use in the Spirit-filled, gospel-driven pursuit of godliness, that is, closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ.”³⁰ This is echoed in 1 Timothy 4:7. God has enabled spiritual growth of believers through the practice of the disciplines by means of the Holy Spirit. These practices are for God’s glory and the good of believers. M. Robert Mulholland contends that the “holistic practice of balanced spiritual disciplines” becomes “a means of God’s grace to shape us in the image of Christ for others.”³¹ Holistic practice of the spiritual disciplines involves the whole person and embraces the role of human embodiment.

Spiritual formation through suffering. In addition to the spiritual disciplines, God uses suffering in the formation of his people. God uses all things for the good of his people and for his glory, which includes suffering (Rom 8:28). Speaking specifically to persecution, Paul explains, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). Chandler argues that suffering is “another formidable conduit

²⁹Mike Cospers observes a gap between our modern experience and the traditional spiritual practices of the Christian faith. He states, “For most Christians, our before picture is shaped by decades of immersion in this strange world and strange culture that surrounds us. It’s had a deep and powerful formative effect on us.” Mike Cospers, *Recapturing the Wonder: Transcendent Faith in a Disenchanted World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 4. More of Cospers’s observations on modern culture and spiritual formation can be found in *Recapturing the Wonder*.

³⁰Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 9.

³¹M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 120.

of spiritual formation.”³² She continues, “Followers of Christ are shaped in their faith journeys through suffering, whether the result of one’s faith, mistakes and missteps, or uncontrollable circumstances.”³³ Paul encourages believers, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, [and] faithful in prayer” (Rom 12:12). This passage points to various aspects of the formation of the spirit in revealing the necessity of joy, hope, suffering, and prayer in the Christian life. Suffering—often bodily (e.g., illness, loss, infertility, trauma, to name a few)—is a means by which God spiritually forms believers through an intensified dependence on him.

Suffering weans us off of reliance on this world and quickens our desire and longing for Christ. As Mark Maddix contends, “The path to spiritual formation includes joy and success as well as struggle and disappointment. Much of the history of Christianity focuses on struggle and suffering—based on the suffering of Christ—as a necessary aspect of growth and maturity.”³⁴ The response of believers to suffering, trials, or persecution contributes to their spiritual formation. It is helpful to understand that there is value and purpose in the struggle and strife, which helps believers to then respond appropriately when times of suffering come. As Howard notes, “[L]ife’s trials become means of spiritual formation when we approach them with an open heart, a clear mind, and a strong will.”³⁵ These are qualities that should be embodied by believers if they desire to respond to suffering in a God-glorifying way that contributes positively to their spiritual formation. He further explains, “We cannot control illness. But in many cases we can control our responses to illness. We can sing when we suffer, as Paul did in

³²Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 79-80.

³³Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 79-80.

³⁴Mark A. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, 243.

³⁵Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 117-18.

prison. By controlling ourselves in the midst of a trial, we make trials a positive means of grace for our formation in Christ.”³⁶ These responses involve the whole person, as they require not only right thinking, but also God-glorifying action.

Physical Dimension

The physical body is often neglected within models of spiritual formation, yet it is a vital aspect in the formation process. God has created human beings as an embodied people (1 Thess 5:23). Therefore, it is important to recognize the truth in Grudem’s words: “Almost everything we do is done by means of the use of our physical bodies.”³⁷ Scripture demonstrates that the body is a means by which God can be glorified (Rom 12:1). Within the physical dimension, the aspects of physical health, complete wellness, and how the body relates to the other dimensions is discussed.

Physical health and wellness. God’s view of the body and his purposes for it should drive a Christian understanding of human embodiment. Strictly focusing on the physical body is unhelpful, as it creates compartmentalization and a type of materialism that neglects the role of the soul. As discussed in chapter 2, focusing primarily on one’s physical health has been a trend within Christian health and wellness literature and a reaction against the neglect of the physical body within the Western church context. With good intentions, authors have advocated for physical health and related concerns—such as weight loss, healthy eating, and other wellness-related topics. However, these

³⁶Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 118.

³⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 448. For additional discussion on the physical aspect of human beings, see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 199, 448-49. As Grudem discusses, it is possible to reflect on how the physical body relates to characteristics of God. Grudem states, “For example, our physical bodies give us the ability to see with our eyes. This is a Godlike quality because God himself sees, and sees far more than we will ever see, although he does not have physical eyes like we have. Our mouths give us the ability to speak, reflecting the fact that God is a God who speaks. Our senses of taste and touch and smell give us the ability to understand and enjoy God’s creation, reflecting the fact that God himself understands and enjoys his creation, though in a far greater sense than we do” (448).

resources can tend to neglect the whole person, the need for biblical and theological understanding of embodiment, and often fail to show how caring for one's health relates to the spiritual formation of believers. Therefore, the pendulum swings from neglect of the body for the sake of spiritual development in the spiritual formation literature to primarily focusing on the body. The dynamics within Christian health and wellness literature that lean towards materialism need to be challenged. However, as Charles Sherlock argues, "The importance of physical health and wellbeing, and of the senses, cannot be excluded from what it means to be human."³⁸ Caring for one's physical health contributes to the spiritual formation of believers and God is glorified through the body as a result. A balanced approach to understanding how the physical health and wellness relates to spiritual formation is necessary.

Aspects of physical health. There are several aspects involved in physical health, including nutrition, exercise, sleep, stress management, healthy rhythms of labor and rest, leisure, and sexual health.³⁹ Rick Warren, Daniel Amen, and Mark Hyman contend, "When you provide the conditions for a thriving human being and you remove the impediments to health, disease often simply goes away as a side effect."⁴⁰ When these aspects of physical health are lacking, there are often side effects within the other dimensions. Less than optimal life style choices, such as a poor diet and unmediated stress, have been linked to many preventative diseases. The United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) reveals the disparaging state of chronic disease by describing

³⁸Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 77.

³⁹These categories are generally considered common knowledge when it comes to physical health and wellness, but the ideas have been adapted from the chap. on physical health in Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 181.

⁴⁰Rick Warren, Daniel Amen, and Mark Hyman, *The Daniel Plan: 40 Days to a Healthier Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 73.

how they “are common, costly, and debilitating, but that they can often be prevented” by engaging in healthy behaviors.⁴¹ The CDC further explains, “Most chronic diseases have the same underlying risk factors: tobacco use, poor nutrition, or lack of physical activity . . . [and] are responsible for 7 out of 10 deaths among Americans each year, and they account for 86 percent of our nation’s health care costs, which in 2013 were \$2.9 trillion.”⁴² Neglect of one’s physical health has unfortunate repercussions. These inevitably affect a believer’s ability to serve God to their fullest capacity.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul states, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” Caring for one’s physical health involves mindful, God-glorifying nutritional choices, which involves the proper consumption of healthy foods and adequate water intake. Human beings thrive when they partake of the foods that God has created for their consumption; alternatively, sickness has been unquestionably linked to the overconsumption of unhealthy, processed, man-made foods. Fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, humanely raised meat and seafood, and other fresh food options are all made available to human beings by God’s grace. In lieu of highly processed foods, increasing one’s intake of natural, responsibly grown and raised foods, will have a positive impact on all of life’s dimensions, including physical health, which contributes to their overall formation.⁴³

Physical exercise includes adequately moving and utilizing the body, per one’s ability and as is needed to maintain physical health. As with nutrition, the type and amount of physical exercise that is necessary will depend on the individual. But, it is

⁴¹Center for Disease Control, “At a Glance 2015: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion,” 1, accessed August 19, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/pdf/2015/nccdphp-aag.pdf>.

⁴²CDC, “At a Glance 2015,” 1.

⁴³For more on healthy nutritional choices as they relate to physical health and overall spiritual formation, see Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 187-195.

important to recognize that physical exercise is needed, especially since a high percentage of the population is engaged in a sedentary lifestyle. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes physical inactivity as “one of the leading risk factors for death worldwide”; currently one in four adults and 80 percent of the world’s adolescent population is considered “insufficiently physically active.”⁴⁴ God has designed human beings to move, with the benefits of physical exercise extending far beyond physical health. Researchers have discovered that these benefits are evident in physiology, and according to Chandler, “also for other aspects of human functioning, including cognition, emotional health, stress and depression reduction, and longevity enhancement.”⁴⁵ Glorifying God through the physical body as a believer includes physical activity that is appropriate for one’s lifestyle and ability.

God has designed human beings to be dependent on him in their need for rest. Establishing healthy rhythms of labor and rest is beneficial to all of life’s dimensions. As human beings partake in adequate sleep and rest, there is noticeable difference in one’s mental and emotional capacities, which is part of God’s design. God has established that sleep and rest are essentials to survival, which is demonstrated throughout Scripture. God rested on the seventh day after creation and deemed that day holy (Gen 2:2-3). Exodus 20:8-10 speaks to keeping the Sabbath holy by resting from work. Jesus prioritized rest when he took his disciples to a quiet place away from the crowds, so that they could rest (Mark 6:21-32). These are just a few of many examples from Scripture that demonstrate how sleep and rest are vital to the health of human beings and are means in which God is glorified as believers depend on him. In a society that is largely focused on efficiency and productivity, it is especially necessary to develop rhythms of labor and rest in order to

⁴⁴World Health Organization, “Physical Activity Fact Sheet,” accessed August 19, 2017, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs385/en/>.

⁴⁵Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 197.

maintain a healthy work-life balance and minimize stress, which thereby improves overall wellness.⁴⁶ God has created his people to be dependent on him according to his Word even when it is counter-cultural. Believers should develop healthy God-glorifying rhythms, habits, and ways of life, which also includes relationships.

Relational Dimension

God has created human beings as relational people with the purpose of being involved in community, which is made possible as a result of embodiment. Relationships play a critical role in the formation of believers. This relational capability can be observed in “the depth of interpersonal harmony experienced in human marriage, in a human family when it functions according to God’s principles, and in a church when a community of believers is walking in fellowship with the Lord and with each other,” Grudem says.⁴⁷ A community of believers will include those that are both single or married, as well as those with or without biological family relationships. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit eternally live in relationship with one another and believers are to be God’s image-bearers as they engage relationally with others. J. Todd Billings argues, “Salvation is not self-centered, but is a renewal and restoration of the self precisely through orienting the self toward God, toward the church as the body of Christ, and toward the neighbor.”⁴⁸ The relational dimension of human beings can be observed in

⁴⁶Complete wellness is more than physical health. As a result of sin, chronic disease, illness, and injury are realities experienced by believers. However, these impairments do not hinder believers from flourishing in wellness even though they may experience compromised physical health. Wellness is not contingent upon physical health “when considered from the perspective of each of the other domains of life . . . [it] can be much more fulfilling and deeply satisfying,” according to John Dunlop, *Wellness for the Glory of God: Living Well after 40 with Joy and Contentment in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 47. As discussed in chap. 1, wellness can be defined as a state of health in all of life’s dimensions and is characterized by flourishing. Wellness should not be reduced to specifically physical health, but health as it relates to all aspects of life. Wellness is ultimately dependent on salvation in Christ and is characterized by growth and godliness in each dimension—spiritual, physical, relational, mental, and emotional. Through the body, believers worship God, relate to others in community, grow in sanctification, and experience other means by which God’s purposes for embodiment are made known. These factors contribute to overall wellness.

⁴⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 447.

⁴⁸J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*

three ways: relationship with God, relationship with others—including relationships with both believers and nonbelievers—and relationship with self.

Relationship with God. One of the primary aspects of the biblical metanarrative involves the relationship between God and his people. The Bible is about God and his act of creating, saving, and redeeming his people who exist to glorify their creator. At the point of creation, Adam and Eve existed in perfect relationship with God. As a result of the fall, this relationship was broken. The restoration of the relationship between God and human beings was achieved through the incarnation of Christ, his death, burial, and resurrection. His death paid the substitutionary penalty for sin, so that God's people could be restored to a right relationship with him through faith in Christ (Rom 5:1). A believer's relationship with God is the most important relationship of all, as a relationship without God results in eternal separation from him. Believers are called children of God because of his love that was demonstrated through the person and work of Christ (Gal 3:26). Believers are called to love one another just as God has loved them (John 13:34-35).

Relationships with others. The relational dimension in the life of a believer also involves relationships with others who have been created in the image of God. Through faith in Christ, believers become part of the greater body where they are united in him (1 Cor 12:12-13). For the believer, this includes friendships with other believers whether single or married, marriage and family relationships, and one's relationship with the world (nonbelievers). Relationships are a necessity for all believers, whether single or married, as God has created his people for community. References to the necessity of community and the importance of relationships are found throughout Scripture. Genesis

(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 9.

2:18 reveals that God created a helper for Adam because it was not good for him to be by himself. As a result, God created Eve to be Adam's helpmate (Gen 2:22). The creation of Eve demonstrates how God has created his people to be in relationship with one another and within community. Jesus himself demonstrated the importance of relationship and community as he cared for people and developed friendships with the apostles and others. Jesus gives a new commandment in John 13:34 in which he exhorts his followers to love one another just as he has loved them. The relationships and love that believers share with one another bears witness to Jesus (John 13:35).

In the creation mandate, God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply the earth, which bears witness to the importance of the relationship of the family. God uses marriage as a depiction of Christ and the church: the husband represents Christ, and the wife the body of Christ. In the second coming of Christ, Jesus will be joined with his church forever and the two will become one, as depicted within the marriage relationship. God is also glorified through those who have been called to singleness. Paul explains that those who are single find themselves desiring to honor the Lord and be holy in body and spirit (1 Cor 7:32-34). As Paul exhorts, "Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him" (1 Cor 7:17). Regardless of whether believers are single or married, all people from a biological or adopted family. God is glorified through the family both in the literal sense (mother, father, and children relationships), and also within the context of the church being a picture of the family. Believers have been adopted into the family of God as his sons and daughters; as a result, believers become part of the larger church where they relate to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

God is glorified as believers live in right relationship with others whether that is within the context of the church, the family, or among nonbelieving friends, colleagues, or others. The relational dimension also includes how believers relate to the individuals in the world around them outside the context of singleness, marriage, the

family, and believers in the church body. Believers are to be salt and light in the world, so that the light of Christ would shine before nonbelievers and bring others to know him (Matt 5:13-16). This includes how believers relate to coworkers and those in authority within the work setting. Believers are also called to respect those in authority within government and to obey the laws that have been set (Rom 13:1-7).

Relationality contributes to holistic spiritual formation in that God enables relationships to be used in the spiritual development of believers in a variety of unique ways. Relationships provide believers with different perspectives that are outside of their own, which can be potentially challenging, yet this offers unique opportunities for growth. God can use the perspective broadening aspect of relationships in the spiritual formation of believers by expanding their understanding of people and the world, challenging their beliefs, and helping them to look beyond their personal viewpoints. Relationships also bring about the opportunity for our spiritual gifts to be realized in a communal way. Relationality enables our own gifts to be utilized in conjunction with the gifts of others. This complimentary use of gifts within the context of relationships enables believers to glorify God as they steward well what has been entrusted to them. Relationships also provide the opportunity for accountability, which believers would not have otherwise. As a result, believers experience the significance in confession and repentance, which is a unique, yet necessary experience within the context of a relationship of accountability. Additionally, relationships draw believers out of themselves, which would not be possible within the context of isolation. Therefore, believers will be further spiritually formed as they engage in relationship and community, as God has created them to do so.

The Great Commission calls believers to “make disciples of all nations,” which entails the development of relationships with nonbelievers (Matt 28:19-20). Paul explains that he becomes “all things to all people” as he interacts with nonbelievers, so that he may have the opportunity to share Christ with them (1 Cor 9:22-23). Christ demonstrates

care for the whole person throughout the Gospels, which should impact how believers live on mission within their communities. Believers are to also demonstrate holistic care for others as they develop relationships and seek to “go and tell” according to The Great Commission. Therefore, an important aspect of the relational dimension with others extends past singleness, marriage, the family, and the church to the world and nonbelievers, and even to how believers relate to themselves.

Relationship with the self. The relational dimension also includes how believers relate to themselves. It is necessary for believers to find their identity in Christ, which is the defining point of how they should relate to themselves. Believers are able to have a healthy view of themselves in the knowledge that they have been created and redeemed by God.

Developing a healthy relationship with the self is also a product of a healthy relationship with God and with other believers. A negative relationship with the self can be characterized by a variety of characteristics, including insecurities, anxiety, body image issues, and others. As believers are united with Christ, their identity is found in him. Therefore, it is imperative that those who are experiencing difficulties within this dimension identify who they are in Christ and work through the struggles that they are experiencing within a supportive community. A believer’s identity should be firmly rooted in Christ and relationships with other followers of Christ serve as a reminder of this reality.

God uses the context of relationships to sanctify his people and shape them into Christlikeness. As a result, issues such as fatherlessness, divorce, and nontraditional pictures of marriage and the family are all threats to formation within the relational dimension. Abuse, neglect, and lack of supportive friends or a strong family structure can have a significant impact on one’s formation within the relational dimension. Healthy relationships benefit human beings in all dimensions, whereas unhealthy relationships

can be detrimental.

As believers are involved in relationships with both believers and nonbelievers, they should remain centered on Christ. This includes remaining centered on Christ personally, as well as maintaining Christ at the center of their relationships with other believers. God's people flourish when they are thriving in their relationship with him, in relationship with other believers, and when their identities are firmly rooted in Christ. The relational dimension reveals the importance of a holistic view of formation in which the whole person is involved. This relational flourishing affects all areas of life, including one's spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional formation.

Mental Dimension

Human beings, created in the image of God, have a mental dimension with a wide range of intellectual capabilities as a result of being an embodied people. These capacities include, but are not limited to, complex language skills, reason, logical thinking, perception of time, and the imagination or creative aspect of the mental dimension.⁴⁹ The type of higher level thinking of which human beings are capable is much different than everything else in creation, which reflects the creativity and intellect of their creator.

God has set humanity apart from the rest of creation in several ways, including their intellectual capabilities. Scripture speaks widely to the mind and the thoughts of human beings. Spiritual formation as centered on the mental dimension means directing one's thoughts toward loving God, renewing the mind with Scripture, and involves learning with the mind. This is made fully evident within the Bible as it speaks to loving God with the mind, renewing the mind, learning with the mind, seeking wisdom, and also refers to various other mental capacities and considerations.

⁴⁹Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 446-47.

Believers must center their thoughts on Christ and love God with their mind (1 Cor 2:16). A lawyer and Pharisee asked Jesus to tell him the greatest commandment in the Law (Matt 22:34-36). Jesus explained, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment” (Matt 22:37-38). The pursuit of knowledge and intellectual growth should stem from a desire to know God deeply and to more fully glorify him. According to Scripture, the mind should be used to glorify its creator. Paul reminds the Colossians that if they “have been raised with Christ,” then they should “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col 3:1-2). God is glorified when believers set their minds on Christ.

In his epistle to the Romans, immediately after appealing to believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices as an act of spiritual worship, the Apostle Paul moved on to the mind of believers. Romans 12:2 calls believers to be transformed in the renewing of their minds instead of aligning with the belief systems of the world. Upon salvation, believers are called out of darkness and into the light, where they experience transformation that affects the whole person including the mind.

Grudem says that as believers “gain in true understanding of God, his Word, and his world, we begin to think more and more of the thoughts that God himself thinks. In this way we are ‘renewed in knowledge’ and we become more like God in our thinking. This is a description of the ordinary course of the Christian life.”⁵⁰ As believers partake in learning, they are to wisely test what they learn in order to discern the will of God (Rom 12:2). They are also able to understand the things of God, including spiritual truths, as 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 states. Specifically speaking to false teaching, Paul warns the Colossians not to be taken captive or deceived by the philosophies or human

⁵⁰Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 445.

traditions of the world because they are not aligned with Jesus, nor his teachings (Col 2:8). Paul calls believers to give their whole selves over for God's glory as he appeals to them to present their bodies as holy and their minds renewed. Believers are living sacrifices because they are made alive in Christ. Therefore, both the mind and the body should be used to glorify God.⁵¹ The mind and its capacities affect each of the dimensions within spiritual formation.

Emotional Dimension

Human beings are uniquely created with the capacity for emotion, which are experienced and expressed by means of the whole person, including the physical body. Emotional expression is foundational to the human experience. Emotions are expressions of inward reactions to circumstances, such as experiences, relationships, and other influencing factors (i.e., tragedy, flourishing, persecution, success, and others). According to Jeff Forrey, they “are best understood as psychosomatic (whole-person) phenomena,” which “typically represent a certain assessment of a situation relative to the person's values, which, in turn, prompts a feeling state that motivates or prepares the person for a stereotypical behavioral response—again relative to the person's values.”⁵² For the Christian, a Christ-centered view of emotional formation provides the foundation from which emotions should be understood.

Believers are emotionally formed as they are continually transformed into Christlikeness through the process of sanctification. Likewise, believers are spiritually

⁵¹There are a variety of ways in which the mind relates to the other dimensions; particular areas of science, such as neuroscience, have sought to study this connection. Neuroscience, the study of the brain and nervous system, reveals a variety of aspects about the brain, including its connection to the body. For additional information on the study of the mind and body, as related to neuroscience, see Brown and Strawn, *Physical Nature of the Christian Life*; Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010).

⁵²Jeff Forrey, “The Biblical Understanding and Treatment of Emotions,” in *Christ Centered Biblical Counseling*, 396.

formed as exhibit God-glorifying emotional expression, which includes the whole person. However, this is not an idle process, but a process in which believers are dependent on God for transformation while simultaneously walking in the Spirit in how they express their emotions. Emotional expression should be holy and seek to honor God, as believers do all things in the name of Christ (Col 3:17). In Scripture, we observe that Jesus expressed emotion, yet he was without sin (Heb 4:15). Jesus is the model for healthy, God-glorifying emotional expression and Scripture speaks to holy emotions; one such example is found in Paul's discussion of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). As human beings are formed emotionally, how they express their emotions begins to reflect God's intentions for emotions, which is to glorify him.

Emotional health includes the righteous expression of emotions. Paul encourages believers to walk by the Spirit, so that they will not give in to the temptations of the flesh (Gal 5:16). The desires of the flesh are opposed to life lived in the Spirit, so believers should abstain from the works of the flesh (Gal 5:17-19). Contrary to the works of the flesh are the fruits of the Spirit, which Paul describes: "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). These characteristics describe believers who are actively walking in the Spirit. As believers embody and exhibit the fruits of the Spirit, they are then able to righteously express their emotions while simultaneously moving away from unrighteous emotional expression.

There are many circumstances that can affect a person's emotional formation. As previously discussed, emotions involve reactions to circumstances whether positive or negative. Suffering can have a profound influence on one's emotional health and formation depending on the level at which the circumstances or issues have been processed. Bodily states as a result of the effects of depression, anxiety, and other health challenges can also have bearing on emotional expression. Even so, a lack of certain hormones, poor nutrition, a sedentary, high stress lifestyle, and other factors can play a role within one's bodily state, thereby affecting their emotional health. Therefore,

emotional formation will also be dependent on a believer's circumstances and life experiences. This reality does not give license to sin in emotional expression, but provides an opportunity for healing and growth as believers seek to process their experiences from a Christ-centered perspective. Grudem notes, "In the area of emotions, our likeness to God is seen in a large difference in degree and complexity of emotions . . . [and] in the complexity of emotions that we experience, once again we are far different than the rest of creation."⁵³ Emotions reveal part of the uniqueness that is inherent in being created in the image of God. The *imago Dei* informs how believers are spiritually formed and enables them to operate from a Christ-centered perspective in each life dimension.

A Sample Model

An example model of Christocentric spiritual formation is displayed in figure 1 below. The graphic provides a helpful image of how Christ is central in spiritual formation. The dotted lines between each life dimension symbolize interrelatedness rather than full separation. The words "human embodiment" are contained within a dotted circle to demonstrate the implications that embodiment has in each life dimension. Figure 1 demonstrates how embodied human beings are to be centered on Christ, as is each life dimension, so that the process of spiritual formation moves forward holistically. This model is simply a visual representation of the basic topics that have been discussed within this chapter, which could potentially be built upon by other researchers. Additionally, research conclusions, contributions of the research, and ideas for further research follow the model below.

⁵³Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 447.

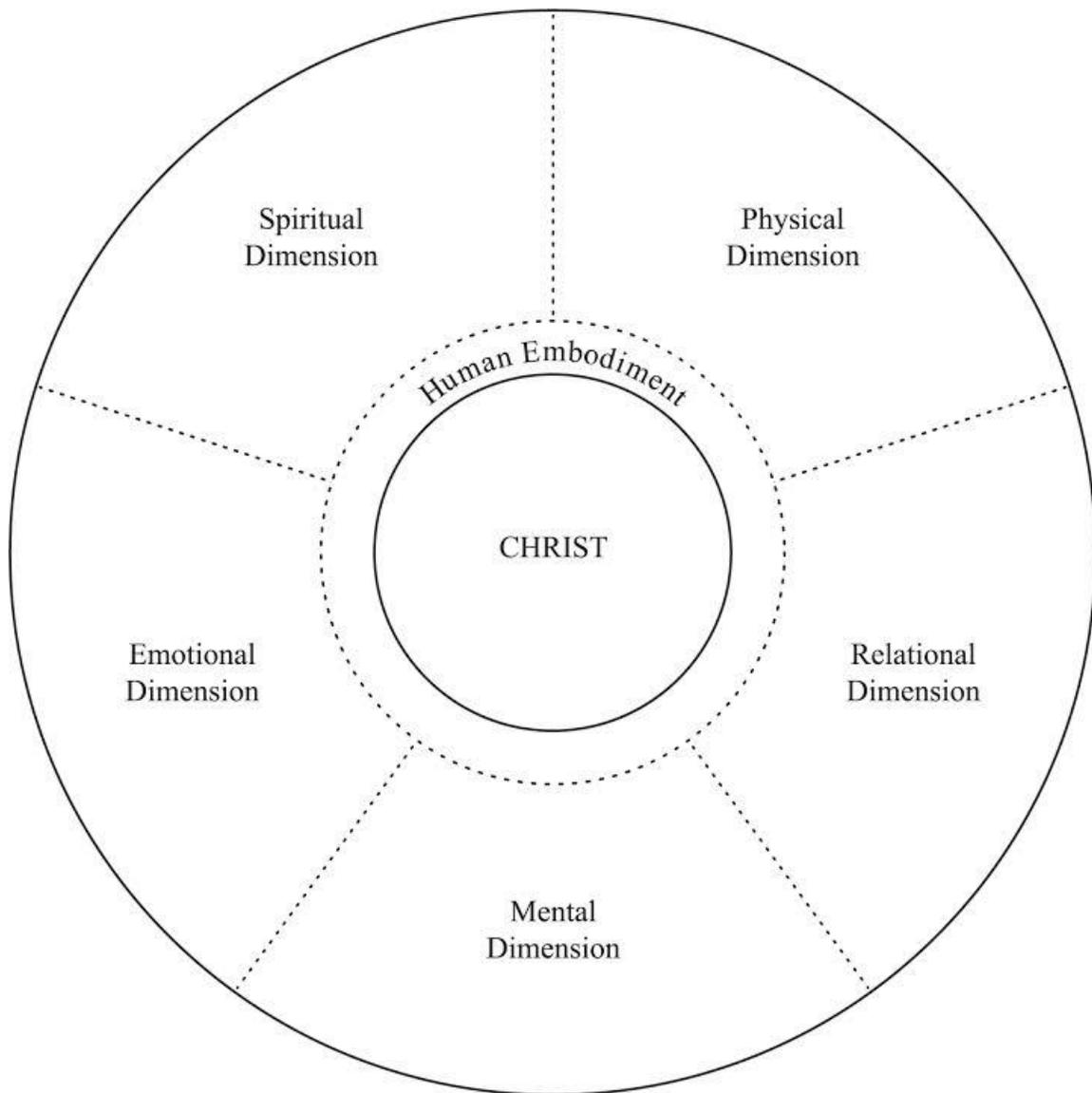


Figure 1. Christocentric model of spiritual formation

Research Conclusions

This thesis provides significant insights into spiritual formation, as it relates to human embodiment. The purpose of this research study is to explore human embodiment, as a fundamental aspect of the human person according to the *imago Dei*, and to describe the implications of human embodiment and to provide an example of a Christocentric model of spiritual formation. The following research questions informed this study:

1. What is a biblical framework for developing a theology of human embodiment?
2. What importance does human embodiment play in Christian spiritual formation?
3. What elements should be included in a Christocentric spiritual formation model that adequately address the soul and body?

The research demonstrates that Scripture provides the foundation for developing a theology of human embodiment, which is vitally important considering the current lack of teaching on the physical body within the Western church context. The study assesses particular views on the soul and the physical body within early Greco-Roman philosophy and how the early church fathers and New Testament writers responded to such teaching. Scripture provides a corrective lens from which the physical body should be biblically understood and how it relates to spiritual formation.

Based on the findings, the research reveals opportunities within the literature base for a type of spiritual formation model that is Christocentric and appropriately considers the role of human embodiment. The research includes a review of the relevant precedent literature, including Christian spiritual formation and health and wellness literature written from a Christian perspective. Christian spiritual formation literature often emphasizes spiritual development while neglecting the role of human embodiment, while health and wellness literature tends toward an overemphasis of the body. Scripture reveals that the whole person is involved in spiritual formation and human embodiment plays a significant role in the formation of believers.

This research also contends that there are various dimensions in which spiritual formation occurs, based on the God-given capacities of human beings. God created human beings with spiritual, physical, relational, mental, and emotional capacities, which are all involved in the process of spiritual development. Therefore, these elements should be included within models of spiritual formation, as the research proposes. Additionally, the research reveals that spiritual formation models should be Christocentric because Christ is central in the process of spiritual formation and informs each life dimension as a

result.

Contribution of the Research

These research findings are substantial, as they fill a gap within the spiritual formation literature by further developing the life dimensions that contribute to spiritual formation, especially in regard to human embodiment. These dimensions include the spiritual, physical, relational, mental, and emotional aspects of the human person. This thesis rightly integrates the physical body into the spiritual formation process according to a biblical understanding of human embodiment, which is not common in most current spiritual formation approaches. The field of spiritual formation is not a widely published area of study, which inherently creates opportunity for further contributions. This opportunity is especially true when considering the need for spiritual formation approaches that address the whole person and are Christocentric in design and application.

This research provides church leaders with the opportunity to inform and influence the formation of believers in a holistic manner. It enables churches to embrace a proper biblical and theological understanding of human embodiment and to address believers as whole people within all contexts, especially regarding spiritual formation. This foundation will enable church leaders to demonstrate Christ-centeredness and to influence the formation of believers in all areas of life rather than simply focusing on knowledge acquisition or spiritual practices. Church leaders will expand their understanding of the spiritual disciplines as involving both the whole person and as being one aspect of spiritual formation rather than the only means by which spiritual development occurs. As a result, believers will experience integrated formation and will witness how each of the life dimensions are interrelated and centered on Christ. This research is not to disparage contributions from former literature within the area of spiritual formation, but rather to offer a unique perspective on models of formation,

especially as it relates to the role of human embodiment.

This research will also help educators within Christian academic settings as they seek to educate students and form their minds and hearts around Christ. Operating from a holistic understanding of spiritual formation would enable educators to engage students as whole beings rather than simply appealing to the transmission of knowledge or spiritual development at the neglect of the physical body. Utilizing a Christocentric model of spiritual formation to inform one's teaching could be transformational within the classroom as educators teach not just to the mind, but to the whole person. Hall and Thoennes explain,

At minimum, we should be aware that the body matters. It matters to our teaching. When we become aware that we are teaching embodied creatures, our methods can take this into account in including experiential exercises that tap into our embodied knowledge, making our teaching more effective and leading to a more holistic understanding of the subject matter.⁵⁴

Educators should embrace the embodied nature of their students and in turn, recognize that how they personally live out their embodiment affects their students' ability to learn.⁵⁵ Hall and Thoennes continue, "A healthy view of the Christian body is also necessary in helping our students struggling with problems of embodiment."⁵⁶ They contend that educators must communicate "in words and actions that God understands embodied experiences such as intellectual limitations and failures, physical pain, tiredness, and temptation by lust or gluttony."⁵⁷ As a result, educators would be able to encourage students in all of life's dimensions as they emphasize the importance of the whole person according to God's Word and seek to engage students in a holistic way

⁵⁴Hall and Thoennes, "At Home in Our Bodies" 43-44.

⁵⁵Hall and Thoennes, "At Home in Our Bodies," 44.

⁵⁶Hall and Thoennes, "At Home in Our Bodies," 44.

⁵⁷Hall and Thoennes, "At Home in Our Bodies," 44-45.

within the classroom setting.

This research could also be beneficial for those in various health care settings. For the counselor, medical doctor, physical therapist, or fitness trainer, this research provides the opportunity to address the whole person rather than selecting one aspect of the soul or body, whether that is the metaphorical “heart” within the counseling session or the physical body within the gym or office setting. For counselors, this research could help them to counsel from a holistic perspective; rather than strictly focusing on heart issues as isolated within the spiritual realm, counselors would be able to engage the whole person by addressing issues within each life dimension since these areas are interrelated. This would include understanding the implications that embodiment has within the counseling setting, an area that is often underemphasized. For example, in a client struggling with anxiety, the counselor could not only utilize Scripture to address the various heart issues that could be factors, but also could relate lifestyle choices, such as exercise, nutrition, and sleep, as integral to one’s care and as possible contributors to anxiety. This would provide counselors with the opportunity to demonstrate how believers are formed as whole people and how stewardship in each life dimension glorifies God. For the medical doctor, physical therapist, or fitness trainer, this would include focusing on the whole person rather than just the physical body. As healthcare professionals work with individuals, they would be able to engage each life dimension within their respective settings. Health care workers have a unique opportunity to assist clients or patients in understanding how Scripture speaks to the importance of the whole person and what this looks like from a practical perspective.

As opposed to compartmentalized perspectives or teaching that undermines the physical body, church leaders, as well as professionals within healthcare and related fields, should help believers understand the following, from Anthony Hoekema: “The Bible . . . does not teach any such sharp antithesis between spirit (or mind) and body. According to the Scriptures matter is not evil and has been created by God. The Bible

never denigrates the human body as a necessary source of evil, but describes it as an aspect of God’s good creation, which must be used in God’s service.”⁵⁸ God works in and through the whole person as they are in Christ as a new creation. Christ must be central in the understanding of spiritual formation. A Christocentric spiritual formation approach that is informed by a biblical and theological understanding of human embodiment offers a corrective balance in settings that tend toward the transmission of knowledge, such as the church or academia, and in environments that lean toward a sole focus on the physical body, such as in healthcare settings, or spiritual development within the counseling realm.

Areas for Future Research

Several opportunities for future research exist, which would serve to enrich this study. First, this study analyzes key models of Christian spiritual formation while paying particular attention to specific models that engage the topic of human embodiment. Since this study did not analyze and address all models of spiritual formation, a comprehensive study on models of Christian spiritual formation could be organized in order to more deeply assess further opportunities for improvement. For example, one could explore the role of the spiritual disciplines, as they relate to human embodiment, within models of spiritual formation in order to demonstrate how they relate to one another, but also how to distinguish the two concepts in a helpful and meaningful way.⁵⁹ Furthermore, this research could be utilized to create a more extensive Christocentric model of spiritual formation that integrates human embodiment in relation to each life dimension.

Another worthwhile endeavor would be a study on how the doctrine of union

⁵⁸Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 206.

⁵⁹Cheong and Lambert, “The Goal and Focus of Spiritual Formation,” 286-87.

with Christ relates to a Christocentric model of spiritual formation that integrates human embodiment. Opportunities within spiritual formation literature exist for a more robust discussion of how union with Christ informs the process of sanctification and spiritual formation. This would assist in mitigating the extreme position of solely focusing on the physical body, as is the case within most Christian health and wellness resources.

Third, more comprehensive research could be done on recent findings in neuroscience regarding the relationship between the mind and the body and how this contributes to a holistic understanding of the human person. This research could relate the findings of neuroscience to the field of spiritual formation, possibly in a very helpful way. Alternatively, this research could observe the way in which findings in neuroscience could potentially contribute to a biblical and theological understanding of human embodiment.

Fourth, a comprehensive study of health and wellness literature, as well as Scripture related to health, could be conducted in order to develop a full theology of health and wellness, which could be integrated into the physical dimension of the spiritual formation model. As demonstrated in the literature review, an opportunity within the literature exists where a full theology of health and wellness is needed. As discussed in this thesis, the Western church context generally has difficulty in knowing how to address human embodiment, especially as it relates to health, and this thesis seeks to contribute positively to that need. However, a more specific development of a theology of health could help strengthen this present study.

Lastly, the Christocentric model of spiritual formation proposed in this thesis could be tested within a variety of settings in order to assess its strengths and weaknesses. This testing could be conducted within a church, academic setting, or within health care and related environments. In addition to revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed model, such an assessment would give insight into how this model could be further refined to increase its effectiveness.

Conclusion

As opposed to a compartmentalized approach to spiritual development, a Christocentric, holistic approach to spiritual formation that integrates a biblical and theological understanding of human embodiment is needed within the current church context. Such compartmentalized approaches often disregard the physical body at the expense of the spiritual, which neglects to embrace all that is inherent within the *imago Dei*. Appealing to the importance of *imago Dei* demonstrates the pivotal role that human embodiment has in relation to spiritual formation. Church leaders, as well as all believers, must recognize each of the implications inherent in being created in the image of God. Hoekema asserts,

One of the most important aspects of the Christian view of man is that we must see him in his unity, as a whole person. Human beings have often been thought of as consisting of distinct and sometimes separable ‘parts,’ which are then abstracted from the whole. So, in Christian circles, man has been thought of as consisting either of ‘body’ and ‘soul,’ or of ‘body,’ ‘soul,’ and ‘spirit.’ Both secular scientists and Christian theologians, however, are increasingly recognizing that such an understanding of human beings is wrong, and that man must be seen in his unity.⁶⁰

Being created in the image of God involves every aspect of the human person, including each of the life dimensions discussed within the proposed model of spiritual formation. The research observed through this study indicates that church leaders, as well as healthcare professionals and those in related fields, have the God-given opportunity to influence the spiritual formation of believers by teaching a holistic understanding of the human person, as informed by Scripture, and by demonstrating how to live an integrated life from a Christ-centered perspective for the glory of God.

⁶⁰Hoekema. *Created in God's Image*, 203.

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPLICATIONS OF AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF THE BODY FOR CHRISTOCENTRIC SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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Christocentric spiritual formation approaches that incorporate the physical body are lacking in the literature base. The physical body plays a crucial role in spiritual formation; failure to recognize the significance of human embodiment in this way neglects a fundamental aspect of the *imago Dei*. This thesis researches the biblical view of human embodiment and assesses how the physical body relates to spiritual formation. Often, the soul—or spiritual dimension of believers—is elevated at the expense of the physical body within the Christian context due to insufficient theology of human embodiment. This is often rooted in a dualistic, compartmentalized understanding of humanity. The relationship between the physical body and spiritual formation is rooted in an evangelical theology of human embodiment founded in Scripture, which is necessary for a holistic understanding of the human person. The Bible demonstrates that God has created the whole person with the purpose of bringing glory to himself.

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