

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 39

Paul's Anthropological Terms "Body"

Do you ever watch "Food Network?" I love the channel. It does make me wish my television came with a "smell" feature so I could enjoy the aroma of the foods, but that would probably lead me to greater weight issues. It is probably best that there is no smell feature!

One of my favorite people on Food Network is Alton Brown. His flair for entertaining while educating always captures my interest. One of Alton's "rules" for purchasing kitchen tools is to never buy a tool that serves only one function. Alton believes that any tool you buy should be multi-functional, able to do several tasks.

For example, Alton took a used broom handle, cut a 12 inch piece off the end and whittled the wood at one end into a "V" shape. This was for pushing hot racks and pans into the oven. Rather than have the tool for just one use, Alton took the other end and fashioned it into a hook. This end served the function of pulling racks out of the oven. One tool...two functions.

A similar economy has served humanity in the field of language. We have words that serve a variety of functions. In fact, very few words have only one meaning. Think about the word we study today: body. The definitions for "body" span five pages in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Consider some various English usages:

- The material part of man – "His body was fighting off the disease."
- The whole person – "I want everybody to listen to this!"
- A corpse – "We found a body that had been shot."
- The main portion of the trunk, as opposed to arms and legs – "The fit was a bit tight in the body, but the arms were fine."
- The main or central part of a matter – "After this introduction, I will write the body of this lesson."
- An entity that exists in itself – "There is a body of water near Houston called Lake Conroe."

- A number of persons taken collectively – “I have checked with a body of experts to determine the likely answer.”
- The shell of a vehicle – “I took my wrecked car to get body work at the body shop!”
- A collection of fighting forces – “I took a body of troops to support the mission.”
- A group – “We will consider this word in the context of the whole body of Paul’s writings.”
- A separate portion of matter – “which heavenly bodies did you examine with your telescope?”

While the origins of the English word “body” are unknown, scholars can at least trace it back as far as the Old English¹ *bodig* and the Old High German² *botah*. (I might add that I have heard some people on television still pronounce “body” a bit like the Old High German: “Ah behlehve that she has had extennnsive work on her botah -- at least threh nose jobs!”)

This word “body” gets the honor of translating one of Paul’s words that we study today. Since Paul wrote in neither English nor Old High German, we will need to go back and capture his term out of the Greek language. Paul’s word for “body” was the Greek *soma*³ (σωμα). Paul used it in many surprising and unique ways. Paul’s usage of this one Greek word would have surpassed all of Alton Brown’s economic concerns of multi-purpose tools!

APPROACH

We have learned repeatedly through these lessons that Paul’s New Testament letters were written in Greek. We also know that Paul knew both Hebrew and Greek well enough to quote the Old Testament in either its Hebrew original or its Greek translation (which we call the “Septuagint”). From Paul’s ready exchange with the Greeks in Athens, where Paul quoted Greek poets, as well as from his general letters, we know that Paul was conversant with Greek culture and many

¹ Old English, also called Anglo-Saxon, was spoken in parts of England and Scotland from approximately 450AD to 1150AD.

² Old High German was spoken in what is now central Germany from about 500AD to 1050AD. Interestingly, the word has disappeared from German replaced by “*leib*” and “*korper*” for a live and dead body respectively.

³ We find *soma* occasionally in English in words like “psychosomatic” where someone’s bodily ailment is in his mind (in his “psycho”).

Greek traditions. Because we know these things, we consider both the Greek and the Hebrew influences behind vocabulary when we study Paul's letters. Those considerations are extremely important in today's lesson.

Sometimes it is particularly difficult for us to wrap our minds around certain Hebrew Old Testament concepts. For those of us who are products of Western civilization, we have strong roots in the Greek philosophies that set Western culture on its path that brought us to this point in time and understanding. The differences between historical Greek thought and biblical Hebrew thought on some issues is as stark as the difference in their alphabets. Contrast the first two letters of each alphabet and see which is most familiar to modern English:

<u>Greek</u>	<u>Hebrew</u>	<u>English</u>
A (α)	א	A (a)
B (β)	ב	B (b)

In the study of man's makeup, the differences are similarly stark. Hebrew Old Testament thought focused on man as a singular entity while Greek philosophy had spent considerable time dividing man into a soul within a body.

In this arena, like that of the alphabet, Western Civilization is a product of the Greek mindset. We tend to think of ourselves as a "being" or "essence" (some might call it a "soul" or "spirit") set within a physical body. This belief is rooted philosophically in the writings of Plato. In *Phaedo*, Plato writes about Socrates's death. Using Socrates as his voice, Plato argues that the soul, unlike the body, is immortal. The body functions like a prison, holding the soul captive until death, which releases the soul. We need to be prepared to set aside this deeply ingrained concept to arrive at the Hebrew thought in the Old Testament of man as one substance.

At this point, we consider this only to note, saving the support for a later lesson, that Paul was not of the Greek frame of mind as he wrote of "body" (*soma*). For Paul, the body (*soma*) was not simply a physical framework containing the essence of a person.

We will delve into this in more depth in a later lesson where we consider whether Paul taught of man as divided into three parts (body, soul, and spirit); two parts (inner and outer man); or simply one entity.

We should also add that Paul did not simply carry forth an Old Testament idea of "body." If we were to take the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that Paul used (the "Septuagint" mentioned earlier and explored in previous lessons) and explore where the translators used *soma*, then we see it used in a

much more limited way than Paul used it.⁴ We might say, Paul took the word “body” and fleshed it out considerably!

Our plan of attack is to first consider Paul’s basic and core meaning of *soma*, which aligns nicely with the Old Testament concept of man. We will then consider how Paul took the word and used it in unique ways not found elsewhere in Scripture.

BODY

Paul’s core usage of body (*soma*) referred to a whole entity (almost always a human⁵) beyond simply the flesh we English speaking Western civilization products often associate with a “body.” For example, in Romans 12:1 Paul appeals to the Romans to:

Present your bodies (*soma*) as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Paul means here to present all that we are, our entireties, to God moment-by-moment, day by day. He means for us to live fully for God and God’s plans, not simply our flesh, but our minds, our hearts, our souls, our spirits. “Body” here means the full human, with all her/his parts. This is apparent from several verses later where Paul adds:

For as in one body (*soma*) we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function....” (Rom. 12:4).

We see this over and over in First Corinthians where Paul wrote of the body (*soma*) being “for the Lord” (1 Cor. 6:13) and “members of Christ” (1 Cor. 6:15). Paul explains that one should never join his body (*soma*) to a prostitute for it causes one to become one “body” (*soma*) with the prostitute.

Commenting on these First Corinthians 6 usages, John A. T. Robinson wrote:

⁴ We should note that considerable inter-testamental writings show evidence of Greek influence in regard to the issue of the body and duality. See the synopsis of Gundry, Robert H., *Soma in Biblical Theology, With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Cambridge 1976) at 87ff.

⁵ In 1 Corinthians 15:37, Paul uses *soma* (body) to refer to a kernel of wheat. There, he also means the entire entity, the whole kernel. A second “non-human” usage of *soma* is found in Colossians 2:17 where Paul writes of festivals, the Sabbath, and kosher diets as “a shadow of the things to come, but the substance (*soma*) belongs to Christ.”

But this same passage shows how *σῶμα* [*soma/body*]...does not mean simply something external to a man himself, something he has. It is indeed what he is.⁶

Paul is not simply saying that the two physical presences (physical bodies) merge into one. He means that the entire persons interrelate in ways that are improper. It is, in 21st century parlance, an emotional, psychological, and spiritual merging as well as a physical one. Something happens to the core of one's being; sexual relations are never just a "physical" thing.

Instead, Paul says the body (*soma*) is the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19) where God should be glorified! Paul means that the entire human is for the Lord and a member of Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells the full human, not simply some fleshly body. All that we are should glorify the Father.

While Paul's core meaning of *soma* centers on the whole of a person, Paul also uses the word to emphasize the physical part of man. We see this, for example, in Second Corinthians 10:10 where Paul wrote of his detractors who say of Paul:

His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is of no account.

Similarly in Colossians 2:23, Paul wrote of those who live under rigorous physical regulations as to food and activity:

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

In even more detail, much like we in English use our word "body" in different ways, Paul occasionally used the word to refer to specific parts of the human body. We see this in Romans 4:19 where Paul writes that Abraham never weakened in his faith that God would keep a promise of him having offspring even "when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about one hundred years old)."

Even with the occasional specific usages, we can see that Paul's general meaning behind the word body (*soma*) was not simply physical. Paul wrote of the body as part of the whole man, not simply the physical aspect of man. This was a classical Hebrew view of man in a unified sense. This is what Robinson meant when he wrote:

⁶ Robinson, John A. T., *The Body: a Study in Pauline Theology* (SCM Press 1952) at 35.

Man does not *have* a body, he is a body. He is flesh-animated-by-soul, the whole conceived as a psycho-physical unity.⁷

We can take this core idea and now explore where Paul took the word body (*soma*) beyond that usage in the Old Testament, or even by other authors of the New Testament.

PAUL'S EXTENDED USE OF BODY

Paul takes the word body (*soma*) and meshes it into several theological concepts in ways not seen outside his writings. For Paul, the word is employed in explaining the fall of man, the salvation of man, the incorporation of man into the church, the nourishment of man in the church, and the destiny of man in the resurrection. We will take each of these areas and consider some of Paul's passages. As we do so, we will highlight how Paul's consideration of the "whole of man" is relevant in understanding his extended theological usage of body (*soma*).

Soma and the Fall of Man

In a number of places, Paul writes of the effect of the fall on the human body (*soma*). Understanding Paul's core meaning as one of the whole man when writing of "body" helps us better understand what Paul was teaching on the fall. Consider these verses:

- "Therefore [because they did not honor God as God] God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their **bodies** (*soma*) among themselves" (Rom. 1:24).

Paul certainly means to convey that those who disregarded God were given to dishonoring their physical bodies. This is clear from the later verses 26 and 27 where Paul explained that they "exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature." Yet, Paul is not limiting this to physical sin, as is apparent from verse 28 where Paul adds that God gave them up to a "debased mind." Throughout this section, there are multiple times Paul says, "God gave them up." Depravity struck the full person in all aspects.

- "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this **body** (*soma*) of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

⁷ Robinson, John A. T., *The Body: a Study in Pauline Theology* (SCM Press 1952) at 18. Similarly, Rudolf Bultmann wrote, "The most comprehensive term which Paul uses to characterize man's existence is *soma*, body." *Theology of the New Testament* (Baylor Press 2007 Printing) at 192. For a fuller recitation of authorities in support of this view, as well as the contrary arguments, see Gundy at 3ff.

Paul's fallen man, his "body of death" that needed deliverance was not simply his physical body with its physical ailments. All of Paul was fallen, except where God's Spirit was working. All of Paul needed deliverance. Paul needed deliverance in areas we would call emotional, intellectual, spiritual, as well as physical. Paul needed deliverance from his lack of will power.

- "But if Christ is in you, although the **body** (*soma*) is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10).

Again, the death from sin, the results from the fall, did not just affect the physical body, apart from some other aspect. The fall brought about full death in all areas. Man is not limited from purity simply by what we think of as a physical body, man is limited in all ways. This is the body or life that must die and be born again. Hence, Paul wrote three verses later:

- "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the **body** (*soma*), you will live" (Rom. 8:13).

Soma and the Salvation of Man

Paul took the word body (*soma*) and extended it into his teaching on salvation:

- "Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the **body** (*soma*) of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God" (Rom. 7:4).

We were not simply saved from the need to live perfect before God because Jesus died physically. It was through the body (*soma*), the entirety of Christ, that our redemption came. Christ the obedient one, Christ the faithful one, Christ the perfect one gave himself fully on our behalf. In that total sacrifice we find our total death to the law, and life that may bear fruit in all areas before the Lord.

- "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his **body** (*soma*) of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him" (Col. 1:22).

Again, we see that Christ reconciled us in his body (*soma*). We should not get distracted here by Paul calling it a "body of flesh." When we cover Paul's term translated "flesh" (*sarx*) we will see why. Paul is again saying that the full death of Christ as man brought about the reconciliation believers share.

- "For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells **bodily** (*soma*)" (Col. 2:9).

As we consider Christ today, whom Edward Fudge last week explained as “our man in heaven,”⁸ we should remember that the “fullness of deity dwells bodily” in him. Jesus is not simply God in a human shell. Jesus has within his full essence, the full essence of God. Jesus is God. Can there be any question whether this Jesus can save? How could the God who made all, be unable to bring salvation to anyone willing to come into relationship with him?

Soma and the Church

Paul takes the word body (*soma*) and uses it in a unique way scripturally when he refers to the church. No other writer in the Bible uses the phrase “body of Christ” to refer to the fellowship of believers or the church. This is only Paul’s usage:

- “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his **body** (*soma*), the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22-23).
- “There is one **body** (*soma*) and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call” (Eph. 4:4).
- “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the **body** (*soma*) of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).
- “We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole **body** (*soma*), joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the **body** (*soma*) grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:15-16).
- “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his **body** (*soma*), and is himself its Savior” (Eph. 5:23).
- “And he is the head of the **body** (*soma*), the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent” (Col. 1:18).
- “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his **body** (*soma*), that is, the church” (Col. 1:24).
- “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one **body** (*soma*)” (1 Cor. 12:13).

⁸ See the video interview of Edward Fudge, author of multiple commentaries on Hebrews. The video is available for download on the class website, www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

- “Now you are the **body** (*soma*) of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27).

Why in all these passages is Paul so comfortable calling the church the “body” (*soma*) of Christ? Certainly, we are not to see that the church is the entirety of Christ! That is not Paul’s import. Paul taught that the believers unite in Christ and together constitute his presence on earth. The Holy Spirit dwells in the believers and in the church, just as the Spirit dwelt within Jesus Christ on earth. The Spirit was poured out on the church at Pentecost and we are the presence of Christ on earth!

Paul took the implications from this and pounded home the need for the church to fellowship, love each other, live in harmony, build each other up, and seek to serve each other with their gifts. Take a moment and read the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 12. See the way that Paul uses the parallel of a body to the way the church works together. Body (*soma*) makes a perfect metaphor and explanation for the role the church has before the world as well as in its own internal relationships.

Soma and the Nourishment of Man

Paul uses body (*soma*) also in his presentation of the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper. In this sense, Paul echoes the delivery of Christ when first instituting the Supper, but Paul takes it a step further in explanation:

- “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the **body** (*soma*) of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16).
- “And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my **body** (*soma*) which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24).
- “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the **body** (*soma*) and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27).

Paul saw the participation in the body and blood of Christ not simply as a consumption of Christ’s physical body. Paul saw and taught that in the Eucharist, the believer was participating in the fullness of Christ, in his full perfection. Jesus ministers in the supper not simply by sharing physical nourishment, but by meeting the nourishment needs of one’s spirit, one’s heart, and one’s soul. We participate in Christ in his fullness, and it demands our fullness as well. We are to bring him all that we are as we share in his body through the Lord’s Supper.

Soma and the Destiny of Man in the Resurrection

So, what happens when we die? What happens at the resurrection? Are we simply cloudy spirits that float about? Do we have form? Do we have memories? Do we have our personalities? In writing on the resurrection, Paul again finds the word *body (soma)* as his helper in explaining our destiny:

- But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of **body (soma)** do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the **body (soma)** that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a **body (soma)** as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own **body (soma)**. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly **bodies (soma)** and earthly **bodies (soma)**, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural **body (soma)**; it is raised a spiritual **body (soma)**. If there is a natural **body (soma)**, there is also a spiritual **body (soma)**" (1 Cor. 15:35-44).

Paul packs quite a bit into this discussion. In answer to the Corinthians' question about what kind of *body (soma)* comes with the resurrection, Paul does not give a direct answer (unless you consider "You foolish person" an answer!). Paul does, however, make clear that there is a resurrection *body (soma)*. We have now read enough of Paul to know that Paul means the resurrection comes as a full person. It is not simply a physical resurrection, nor is it a resurrection of a spirit floating around in eternity. God will bring forth for all believers a full *body*, made perfect, held in the Spirit, imperishable, and glorious. That is the destiny to which the believer confidently lives and dies!

CONCLUSION

As we study Paul's writings on the *body (soma)*, it gives us good insight into other scriptures God gave us through the pen of Paul. But to more fully understand this, we are going to need to probe the difference for Paul between "body" and "flesh." We are also going to need to understand man as a unity, a duality, or tri-partite. But, those are for another lesson!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. "*You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his **body (soma)***" (Col. 1:22).

In a moment, this lesson is over. In a moment, you return to your “non-lesson life.” Before you do so, stop for a moment and think: God fully dwells in the being of Christ. Christ chose to set aside the fullness to come to earth and give himself fully on your behalf and mine. Jesus was not dying simply a physical death. He died in every way, because of love and desire for you and me. In his death, in his body, our entire sinfulness, every aspect of our shortcomings finds resolution and forgiveness. Now, as we leave this lesson, what do we give back to Christ? Simply our bodies? Is it merely what we eat or drink? Is it merely the outward sexual purity? Is it simply the mechanics of stealing or killing? Or, do we give him our bodies in Paul’s sense of *soma*? Do we give him our hearts, our minds, our emotions and wishes, our thoughts and dreams? Do we offer him all that we are or could ever be?

2. “*You are the **body** (soma) of Christ and individually members of it*” (1 Cor. 12:27).

In the class that serves as the origins of these lessons, we are commencing another time of “connection groups.” These are small groups of family units (and yes, for some that unit is a “single”) that meet regularly to grow in closer fellowship together. As this class has grown numerically, people have to make a choice to get involved in ways that bring in the closer fellowship implied in the church being “one body.” That is a decision that each person makes, but it is a decision with reward! God does not put us together into one body because we are easier to corral like a group of sheep. He does so for our own growth and good. So, seize the chance. Get in a group. See how God works in the body for your growth and good!

3. “*God gives it a **body** (soma) as he has chosen*” (1 Cor. 15:38).

Do you dread death? Do you miss others who have gone on? Do you wonder what lies on the other side? Paul assures us that a body God has chosen is there. This is a body that is full, not simply a shell. We shall behold him; we shall behold the church. Is there not a great peace in knowing that God will pick out our eternal bodies? It is his to put together in ways that purify us, ways that bring us into harmony with his eternal glory! Praise God! I will see you there!!!