**Men Without Chests**

Based on [Matthew 22:34-46](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt22.34-46)

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One of my favourite books by C.S. Lewis has a chapter entitled “Men Without Chests.” He refers to a mans chest figuratively as the place where his values are located...much like how we talk today about the heart being the organ of love. “I love you with all my heart” my daughter once wrote to me. And I still imagine her heart, her love, to in some sense to come from her chest.

In a similar way, the belly is figured as the place where our appetites come from. And our head is where our thoughts are stored and decisions are made. These make some physical sense, as our stomach hungers and our brain thinks. But the spiritual anatomy is also real...head for thinking, belly for hungering, chest for valuing. The bible says christ is the head of the church, which means that his thoughts, his commands are what direct us. Scripture says Christ dwells in our hearts, how terrible to think he dwells in our belly and appetites. And Scripture also says of those who teach false doctrine, “Their God is their belly”. Head, heart, belly, all there and all distinct parts of man in scripture.

In “men without chests”, Lewis is critical of the notion that was arising in his time that all values are simply a matter of taste. What people have always thought of as coming from the chest, is really only from the belly. All values are just your own personal feelings. What’s true for you is not necessarily true for me. But that’s absurd. What if we did that with all moral questions? You say “Stealing is bad”, well that’s just a statement of your personal feelings. No, stealing is wrong, regardless of how you happen to feel about it.

Teachers teaching that there is really no distinction between the belly and chest, Lewis argues, is producing a generation of “Men without chests”. Your head carries your thoughts, and your belly carries your appetites and feelings, your chest is located in between them. Strong values...courage, honor, humility, love...constitute a strong chest. And a strong chest is needed to make sure that your head doesn’t decide to do whatever your belly tells it. The chest is there to regulate the belly, or to use a bible phrase, “to subdue the flesh”.

Consider the story of Cain. Cain felt jealous at his brother Abel, and in letting that feeling direct him, he used his head to plan a murder and carry it out. What he needed was a sense of honor, self-control, wisdom to tell his belly “no, even though I hunger for revenge...I will not carry it out.” God warns Cain, “Sin is crouching at your door, but you must rule over it.” Stick out your chest Cain. Don’t give in to your jealousy.

CS Lewis was right. This generation has produced many “men without chests.” In government, in the church, in the family. Men who can speak the right doctrine, and say the right things, but when it comes to doing the right thing at their own expense, they shrink back. They are cowards and fools. Their chests are caved in, so in a crisis their thoughts constantly retreat to their belly. Their minds are directed towards protecting their comfortable lives and pensions and support of the constituency. They talk a good game, but their words are empty. Like Cain, they offer a sacrifice, but it is not of their firstfruits. They say lovely things, but they have no love in their heart perfect enough to cast out their fear. Men without chests, of whom St. Paul says, “Their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame.”

Jesus says that the greatest commandment is to love God with all of your heart, soul and mind...and to love your neighbor as yourself. This love is not of the belly, but of the chest...of the heart. It is a love that is like God’s love...sacrificial. It knows when to say no to the belly, the appetites, the feelings, the self-interests that do not come from God, but from a different spirit. When Eve saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eyes, good for food, and desirable to make one wise, she ate, and gave to Adam and he ate. Her head was turned to serve her belly, because the love of her heart was turned away from God.

Jesus’ criticized the Pharisees in this way. They had the Law of God in their head. They even tied phylacteries, little scrolls with God’s Law written on them, next to their heads. And they could keep that law because they knew and believed that the law is righteous. And they wanted to be righteous. But this desire was not a feeling from the chest, the heart...rather from the belly. They knew that observing the law was a way to be praised by men, and their belly wanted that praise. They reasoned that if they just did these things, they would have God’s approval and their belly wanted that too. Make no mistake, Cain was Jealous because he didn’t understand why God was pleased with his brother’s sacrifice, but not his own. His belly wanted glory from God, and he thought he deserved it because he sacrificed. The pharisees to, are upset to find out that Jesus had no regard for their sacrifices, their phylacteries, their knowledge of the law, their man-made traditions to honor God. If it looked like their heads were big it is only because of their atrophied chests. Love is the greatest commandment, and it is not a feeling from the belly, it is a virtue of the heart.

Your heart affects your head, which is why Jesus so easily bested those who were sent to trap him in words. Their minds were turned against him because their bellies were jealous, they wanted glory from God, and he who came from God did not give it to them. So Jesus argues with them one last time. He gives them a question from the law, what they claim to love and uphold, that presents a dilemma. “How can David’s son be David’s Lord.” How can his descendent be God?

They can’t deny the words of the Psalm, but there is only one way for them to answer. They would have to say that the one coming after David is greater than David. They would have to say that the Christ is greater than abraham, moses, david and solomon combined, and that is exactly who and what Jesus is saying he is. They aren’t dummies. They know that that is the only answer to give that will uphold the law. But that answer would show that Jesus is Lord, and he is right to denied them the glory their bellies were so hungry to have. These men dedicated their lives and all their pride to stuffing their head with God’s Law, but it never reached their hearts...it only served their bellies.

Peter, who himself proved to be a chestless coward when his Lord was arrested learned his lesson well. Satan wanted to sift him as wheat, but Jesus prayed for him, that his faith would not fail. And he persevered as an apostle and leader of the church. And he wrote his second epistle as God’s own Scripture, reminding us not to lose heart, but to build up our chests, so that our minds are always prepared serve Christ rather than our belly. He writes, “make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, ***they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.***