

Your Body, God's Temple
I Corinthians 6:12-20

Several men are in the locker room of a golf club. A cell phone on a bench rings and a man engages the hands-free speaker function and begins to talk. Everyone else in the room stops to listen.

Man: "Hello."

Woman: "Hi, honey, it's me. Are you at the club?"

Man: "Yes."

Woman: "I'm at the shops now and found this beautiful leather coat. It's only \$2,000; is it okay if I buy it?"

Man: "Sure, go ahead if you like it that much."

Woman: "I also stopped by the Lexus dealership and saw the new models. I saw one I really, really liked."

Man: "How much?"

Woman: "\$90,000."

Man: "Okay, but for that price I want it with all the options."

Woman: "Great! Oh, and one more thing. I was talking to Janie and found out that the house I wanted last year is back on the market. They're asking \$980,000 for it."

Man: "Well, go ahead and make an offer of \$900,000. They'll probably take it. If not, we can go the extra \$80,000 if it's what you really want."

Woman: "Okay, I'll see you later! I love you so much."

Man: "Bye! I love you too."

The man hangs up. The other men in the locker room are staring at him in astonishment, mouths wide open.

He turns and asks, "Anyone know whose phone this is?"

I have a feeling that the believers in the church at Corinth would like to hold up the letter they had received from Paul and ask: “Anyone know who this letter’s for?”

Paul has been addressing some really tough situations and having to take the church to task for how it was or wasn’t dealing with them. He dealt with divisions in the church, people picking sides and fighting over position and status.

There was the situation of a member in a sexual relationship with his father’s wife – his stepmother. The church just turned their eyes the other way and in their arrogance, thinking themselves so broad-minded, refused to do anything about it.

Then he wrote about the issue of one member suing another in the secular courts. Not only was this destroying the unity of the body, it was damaging their witness for Christ.

In our study passage today in the book of First Corinthians, Paul is returning to the subject of sexual immorality. The focus of the situation is involvement with prostitutes. It is a problem that might have been going on or was a potential problem given the morals of Corinthian culture.

In the introduction to this series I talked about the fact that Corinth was a very sensual, sex-oriented culture. Sex was readily available with prostitutes and slaves. As a major port city and business center of Greece, it had multitudes of prostitutes to cater to the desires of sailors and businessmen.

Turn in your Bible to the book of First Corinthians, chapter 6. Let me read the passage and then go back and make some observations and talk about application for today.

I Corinthians 6:12-20

Paul begins this section by dealing with some attitudes of current thinking in Corinth. The first had to do with their Christian freedom. Some took this to the extreme in their reasoning. Paul’s quote: “All things are lawful for me,” was the perspective of those who believed that since they were saved and forgiven of sins, they could live as they so desired.

Now, Paul could have responded by bringing down the law on them and calling them to strict law-obedience and punishment. But to do so would have contradicted the truth of the Gospel. So, he rather appeals to them to understand the serious implications of the Gospel.

He replies, first of all, that not all things are helpful. Not everything contributes to one’s well-being and certainly not to one’s spiritual development.

The second thing he says, referring to the Corinthians' thinking, is that though all things are lawful, he would not be enslaved by anything. There is a play on words here in the Greek text. It's something like this: "All things are in my power, but I shall not be overpowered by anything."

The Apostle Peter echoes this truth when he writes:

For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. – *II Peter 2:19*

There are few sins that are more enslaving than sexual sins. Talk to someone who struggles with pornography or sexual addiction.

Paul insists that though he is free to do anything, he will not let anything master him. Then he turns his attention to another current philosophy of his day, thinking which was finding its way into the perspectives of some of those in the Corinthian church.

The Greeks considered the body to be irrelevant to anything significant. There was a Greek proverb: "The body is a tomb." The Stoic philosopher Epictetus said: "I am a poor soul shackled in a corpse."

The intent of Greek religion and philosophy was to help a person get beyond the body and to the only thing that really mattered – the soul or the spirit. This led to two schools of thought. Some people argued that since the body was a tomb you needed to do everything you could do to deny it and all of its passions.

As much as possible deny yourself food, wine, and sex. "Mortify the body" was the war cry of this group.

The second school of thought said, "Well, since the body is unimportant and what you do with it is irrelevant to the soul, why not enjoy life? Live like a raving hedonist." "Deny no pleasure! Indulge yourself in everything."

This, apparently, was more the thinking of some in the Corinthian church. To those who held this view that the body didn't matter, it would be destroyed in the end, Paul says, "Wait a minute! The body does matter. It will be raised in the resurrection." He will write in chapter 15 that the resurrection is a resurrection of the body.

To the Philippians, Paul writes:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. – *Philippians 3:20-21*

Because the body will experience resurrection, physical redemption, it matters what we do with our bodies – whether it be food, drink, other abuse, or sexual immorality; it matters to God and should matter to us.

The Corinthians, thinking that what you did with food was of no importance, applied the same to sex. Kenneth Bailey, in his book *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, writes:

Paul is objecting to the *dehumanizing* of sex that takes place when it is turned into a form of entertainment and made parallel to food. Paul is rejecting the view that says, “I feel hungry – I eat. I feel sexual desire – I engage in sex.”

Paul moves on to the subject of moral purity versus sexual immorality. Once again he uses the word *porneia*, often translated “fornication,” which means any sexual relations outside of the marriage of one man and one woman – whether it be pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, or homosexual acts. Paul makes three major points:

1) Your body belongs to Christ. He says, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ.”

When we come to faith in Christ, we are joined to him. We are united with him, who is holy. Obviously, Paul is not saying here that sex is wrong. The church over the centuries has often communicated something that is totally inaccurate and untrue – that somehow sex is wrong, dirty, shameful.

Listen, God is pro-sex; God is in favor of sex – that’s what the Bible says. God created man – male and female – for companionship. Part of that companionship involves a sexual relationship. Sex was given as an avenue of relational intimacy to make their relationship wonderful and special – given to men and women to celebrate married life – and for the purpose of reproducing human life.

C.S. Lewis wrote: “After all, pleasure is God’s invention, not Satan’s.” Sex is so important that Paul in the next chapter commands married people to engage in sexual relations regularly. We’ll consider that next week, but feel free to read ahead!

We should not be surprised that Satan has found a way to take and destroy the good things God has created. In the realm of sexual relations, Satan has corrupted it, used it to shatter the emotional and psychological lives of people, used it to destroy homes, ministries and reputations, used it to sear children for a lifetime, used it to create conflict between people, and to foster guilt and crush trust.

Paul argues here that when you have sex outside marriage you violate the intent of creation and the mystery of oneness in marriage.

2) The second point Paul makes is that to sin sexually is to sin against your own body. There is no act that so involves our entire being – physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual.

Whereas Paul was very concerned about the effect that tolerating incest and trivial lawsuits had on the body of Christ – the church, here in this passage his overriding concern is of the effect of sexual sin on the individual believer.

Paul is not trying here to make the case that illicit sex is wrong; that was assumed to be true. He is making the case of how great and serious a sin it is. His teaching on restraint in sexual relations outside of marriage is not because sex is bad or wrong, but because it is so powerful to distort or destroy what is so good – a wonderful gift from God to be enjoyed within the boundaries of marriage between one man and one woman.

3) His third point is that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. God the Spirit, comes to dwell within you after you have trusted in Christ. We are not to use our bodies in a way contrary to God's intent for us.

As Christians, we are to be different. We are called to be holy – set apart for God's holy purposes. St. Augustine had been anything but a saint as a young man. He frequented prostitutes and did things young pagans do. One day, he responded to God and his offer of grace and became obedient to Christ.

Soon after his conversion, the story goes, he was walking down the street and a prostitute began to walk after him, calling his name. She called louder. "Augustine, it's me," she said. Augustine turned and replied, "But it's no longer me."

So, what advice does Paul have for us on dealing with sexual temptation? He gives it in the beginning of verse 18: "Flee from sexual immorality."

He later writes to young Timothy, his child in the faith and fellow-worker:

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. – *II Timothy 2:22*

Dr. Gerald Dahl, a clinical social worker, wrote the book *Why Christian Marriages are Breaking Up*. He talks about the examples of Joseph in the Old Testament and Timothy in the New:

We are told not to casually avoid but to boldly run from evil.... If Timothy and Joseph were obedient by running or fleeing the temptation, then surely they must have felt the

temptation. The lesson is this: the problem is not the feelings, but rather our behavior in response to those feelings....

Feelings are involuntary emotional responses to a situation. They are neither good nor bad, but they are real. Behavior is an action response to a feeling. The Bible instructs us about how to respond to a feeling. In this situation we are told to flee, run, or get away from the temptation as quickly as possible.

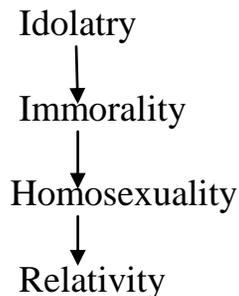
Let me share some final thoughts with you this morning.

1) First of all, we should be concerned, but not surprised at the sexual ethics of our culture. We are fallen people, living in a fallen world. Sin is real and finds its expression in areas that God created for good. Perhaps this is most prevalent and detrimental in the arena of sexual conduct: pregnancies and out-of-wedlock births, abortions, sexually-transmitted diseases, pornography, prostitution, sexual abuse, AIDS, guilt and remorse. People are degraded and misused; families are destroyed; cultures disintegrate morally.

The Bible is very clear about the consequences of people and cultures that disregard the Creator. Paul describes the societal and personal path to moral ruin in his letter to the Romans. Would you turn back one book in your Bible from First Corinthians to the letter to the Romans, chapter one.

Romans 1:18-32

Notice the progression:



2) Because something is commonly accepted does not make it right; because something is legal does not make it moral. If this were the case, abortion would be morally acceptable.

Let's do a little exercise. Stand up; close your eyes; turn around – keeping your eyes closed. And with your eyes still closed, point to north.

Now, keep pointing and open your eyes. This is true north. How can I be right and some of you wrong? Who's to say I'm right and you're wrong? I have a compass.

God's has given us a moral compass to help us know what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false, what is helpful and what is harmful. It is his Word. This is what needs to guide our thinking regardless of whether or not it is popular, legal or pleasurable.

3) Choose to live rightly and godly, even if it's difficult. Paul wrote to his dear friend and colleague, Titus, telling him:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope,

the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. – *Titus 2:11-14*

Richard Gantz writes: "The greatest freedom is self control." Do you want to really experience freedom? Exercise self-control in all things. It is so ironic that the sexual revolution that promised freedom actually produced slavery – slavery to sin. But we have a choice whether we will bring our needs and desires into submission to God's will for our lives.

New Testament scholar William Barclay writes in his commentary First Corinthians:

The great fact of the Christian faith is, not that it makes a man free to sin, but that it makes a man free *not* to sin. It is so easy to allow habits, practices, ways of life to master us; but the Christian strength enables us to master them.

4) If need be, repent of wrongdoing. God is a God of grace. He longs for his children to live in such a way to please him. He also knows our humanness – that we fail and sin and disobey. But he is gracious to forgive and desires to restore us to fellowship with him.

This is a tough subject for discussion in the church, but so needful today. God calls us to be counter-cultural in our thoughts and in our actions. One of Paul's grave concerns for the Corinthians was that they were living no differently than the culture around them. I think he would have the same concern for the church in America.