

Our Bodies Belong to God

Devotional Reading: Psalm 139:13-24

Background Scripture: Romans 12:1-21; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

¹² “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.



Key Text

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; —1 Corinthians 6:19

Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings

Unit 3: Christians and Sacrifice

Lessons 10–14

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the reason why Paul's original readers were to honor God with their bodies.
2. Explain why it's better to view Paul's conclusions as guiding principles rather than direct imperatives.
3. Suggest ways to apply the principles Paul states to a modern situation that didn't exist in Paul's day.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Bodies Joined and Torn
- B. Lesson Context

I. Consecrated Bodies (1 Corinthians 6:12-16)

- A. Controlling (vv. 12-14)
Health with a Purpose
- B. Restricting (vv. 15-16)

II. Consecrated Spirits (1 Corinthians 6:17-20)

- A. Connection with the Lord (vv. 17-18)
- B. Temple of the Spirit (vv. 19-20)

Conclusion

- A. We Belong to God
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Bodies Joined and Torn

My best friend from the first day of high school was Tony. We shared a vibrant faith. We led Bible studies together and even started a band. His father was the minister of a large church in our area and a highly respected member of the community.

The summer before our senior year, Tony's personality began to shift. He became sullen and isolated. He abruptly quit the band, stopped attending our Bible studies, and didn't return my calls. After weeks of being avoided, I drove to his house. His father answered the door. A woman stood next to him, with her hand on his shoulder. She was not Tony's mother. I was told that Tony was staying with his mother. Tony's dad quickly gave me the address and shut the door.

I went to the apartment building where Tony, his mother, and his siblings had moved. Tony answered my knock on the door. When he saw me, he burst into tears and threw himself into my arms. I held him as he cried. We sat at the kitchen table, and he told me everything. His father had met another woman online, invited her to live with him, and asked for a divorce from Tony's mother. The children had sided with their mother, so their father told them all to leave.

For momentary pleasures, this man had destroyed his marriage, ruined his relationship with his children, and lost the goodwill of his church and the wider community. Though joined to his wife as one flesh, he had torn them apart.

B. Lesson Context

We're now in our second lesson from 1 Corinthians, so the Lesson Context from last week's study also applies here. The difference is that today's lesson deals with the touchy subject of sexual immorality. For proper context, we need to be aware of how the standards of morality in the Greco-Roman culture of the first century AD differed from those of today.

One such difference was in how prostitution was viewed. In most cities today, prostitution is seen as illegal. However, the culture of the Medi-

13a. You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food,

This half-verse seems to introduce another Corinthian slogan. In this reading, the Corinthians used “an argument from analogy.” That kind of reasoning often goes something like this: “As *A* is to *B*, so also *X* is to *Y*.” If that is the case here, then the Corinthians were equating the behavior of satisfying sexual urges with the behavior of eating to satisfy cravings of *the stomach*.

What Do You Think?

What cherished slogans do you need to reevaluate?

Digging Deeper

In what circumstances, if any, are slogans helpful? Why?

13b. “and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

The analogy the Corinthians seemed to have been using overlooks the bigger picture. God designed our bodies to function as he intends. Food and stomach were indeed designed to work together, but not so regarding *the body* and *sexual immorality*. On the contrary, the body is meant *for the Lord, and the Lord for the body*. In other words, God intended our bodies for union with Christ, not for union in sexually immoral acts.

Health with a Purpose

Pouring my attention 100 percent into academics gained me college degrees and desk jobs. Those, in turn, left my body out of shape, lethargic, and prematurely aged. I knew what to do about it, living in a culture swamped with diet and exercise information. The problem was mustering the motivation.

That motivation asserted itself when I discovered a new passion: Brazilian jiu-jitsu. A martial art that’s half judo, half wrestling, jiu-jitsu requires chess-like strategy more than physical brawn. It relieved stress, built my confidence, and expanded my social network, not to mention helped me lose 42 pounds in a year!

We know fully what we “ought” to do in the sight of God and how it is all for our benefit. In a moment of temptation, it can be challenging to be self-controlled. What if the key is not white-knuckled willpower to not do something, but rather a drive to remove every obstacle from doing something we love more? —A. W.

14. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

We surrender our bodies and all their desires to the Lord’s service, and he commits himself to us. The fulfillment of the latter is seen in resurrection: Christ’s human body was *raised* from death by *God*, and our bodies will likewise be raised. Resurrection was being denied by some in Corinth, but Paul saves his fuller discussion on that error for later (1 Corinthians 15).

B. Restricting (vv. 15-16)

15. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!

This verse features the first of 16 times that Paul uses the word translated *members* in this letter. For Paul and his readers, this word refers to body parts, such as arms, legs, hands, and ears (compare 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Paul is fond of picturing the church in terms of diverse human body parts with Christ as its head (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15). Use of this metaphor flows from Paul’s points about the believer’s union with Christ in the two verses just studied. Since the believer is united with Christ, he or she is part of Christ’s body.

Having made this point, Paul follows up with a second rhetorical question: Is it permissible to take parts of Christ’s body and join them to a *prostitute*? *Never!*

How to Say It

Corinth	Kor-inth.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in <i>thin</i>).
Ephesians	Ee-fee-zhunz.
Galatians	Guh-lay-shunz.

16. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”

Sexual unions outside of marriage, whether paid or unpaid, make the participants *one* in *body*, in violation of Genesis 2:24. That passage describes the marital union as making male and female “one flesh” (compare Matthew 19:5). Sexual intimacy outside of marriage creates an additional case of *one flesh*. For the married, the result is to bring an additional person into the marriage. This is destructive to God’s intent for the family unit. Things we do with our physical bodies will affect the body that is the church, a body to which we belong as members.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways that married couples can witness God’s “one flesh” intent to an immoral culture?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture passages inform your response?

II. Consecrated Spirits

(1 Corinthians 6:17-20)

A. Connection with the Lord (vv. 17-18)

17. But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Paul again emphasizes the believer’s union with Christ. Referring to *one . . . in spirit* may be puzzling because the word *spirit* can take different meanings depending on context. In some cases, the word might refer to the Holy Spirit. In other cases, it refers to that part of a person that lives on after physical death. In other cases, it refers to a mental disposition.

The key is context. Having just condemned improper intimacy, Paul now contrasts it with an image of a proper relationship: spiritual intimacy *with the Lord* (compare John 17:20-23). The implication here is that sexual immorality not only works against a marriage, but it also works against one’s relationship with God. The brief moments of physical pleasure that an immoral act brings are

trifling compared to the lasting damage it causes. It is not possible to separate sexual behavior from a relationship with the Lord. This spiritual dimension must be the controlling factor.

Another viewpoint is that Paul is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby through the “one Spirit,” the believer’s spirit has been joined indissolubly with Christ. Under this idea, Paul is not comparing spiritual union with physical union. Instead, the focus is on the Holy Spirit, who has united the believer to Christ. Thus, one has no right to unite with another in an immoral way.

18. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.

The final piece of Paul’s argument begins with the succinct command to *flee from sexual immorality*. Paul then uses candid language (again) to justify this strong warning as he puts sexual sin in a unique category of wrongdoing. Other *sins* are *outside the body*, meaning they are external. For example, stealing may use the hands to accomplish the sin, but it is still “outside.” Sexual sin, by contrast, is *against* the body because of the intimate union between those engaged in it.

B. Temple of the Spirit (vv. 19-20)

19. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

Paul here draws upon imagery familiar from earlier in the letter: the body as the Spirit’s temple. Paul previously used this image to describe the entire community. This verse reinforces that Christians are collectively God’s temple on earth (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; compare 2 Corinthians 6:16). *The Holy Spirit* dwells in each follower of Jesus as a gift from God. The presence of the Spirit also signals God’s ownership of that person with the result that *you are not your own*.

The Spirit inhabits the church corporately and each believer individually (Romans 8:9-11). Once this is understood, then one can grasp why engaging with a prostitute is starkly inconsistent with the Christian life. How can a vessel of the Holy

Spirit take part in such an unholy act? Such activity is not merely one of illicit physical pleasure. It is also an act of temple desecration.

20a. you were bought at a price.

For Paul’s original readers, this word picture calls to mind the slave markets of cities such as ancient Corinth. Everyone in the Corinthian church knew of such places. Some may have suffered this dehumanizing experience personally. Some may have been slave owners, perhaps struggling to reconcile that fact with their new identity as Christians. For Paul’s initial audience, the phrase *bought at a price* would have been interpreted as the cost of a ransom to liberate a slave, with the redemption price being the blood of Christ (see Hebrews 9:12; compare Exodus 6:6; Isaiah 43:1; Luke 1:68).

Paul is not explicit about the nature and amount of the price paid (compare Revelation 5:9). Instead, he focuses on the fact that ownership has been transferred (compare 1 Corinthians 7:23).

20b. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Paul concludes with an exhortation. The transfer of ownership obligates believers to *honor God* with their spirits and *bodies* in every way. To honor God with one’s spirit but not with one’s body is hypocrisy.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways we can glorify God with our bodies in the midst of culture’s challenges?

Digging Deeper

How do we improve our ability to recognize those challenges when they come?

Conclusion

A. We Belong to God

Here’s the conclusion to the story we opened the lesson with. My friend Tony did not speak to his father for five years. Tony went on to college, played on a Division III basketball team, and met his future wife. He avoided thinking or talking about his dad.

Then, one day, his dad called him and asked

to meet for lunch. When they met, Tony refused to hug his father or even shake his hand. As they sat at the table, Tony prepared a laundry list of grievances. But his dad was there to apologize. He admitted that he had wronged his wife and children. He begged Tony for forgiveness.

His father’s contrition moved Tony, and he quickly set aside his anger. But he had to ask one thing: Why had his father done it?

His father offered multiple explanations without excusing his actions. But one in particular stood out. He said, “I felt like my life wasn’t my own anymore.” Tony looked into his dad’s eyes and said, “It wasn’t yours to begin with.”

The thrust of Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 is that believers do not have full authority over their lives. We are members of Christ’s body. We are a temple of the Holy Spirit. We belong to God and must act in ways that glorify God. God calls us to live as those who belong to him.

That requires our willingness to resist temptations. And forms of temptation exist today that did not exist in Paul’s day. Yet the principles Paul teaches remain useful in combating these temptations. Paul encouraged his readers to embrace and live in their identities as Christ’s body and the Holy Spirit’s temple. We, too, can and must help ourselves and our children walk in a way that is consistent with the identity God has given us.

It is noteworthy that Paul did not simply reject the slogans of the Corinthians. Nor did he merely give them commands without explanation. He granted that they did indeed possess freedom in Christ. But how were they best using those freedoms? And in what way are we accomplishing this?

B. Prayer

Father God, thank you for making us part of your Son Jesus Christ’s body, the church. Lead us to respect our individual bodies as belonging to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Glorify God with your body.