

The Body is for the Lord
1 Corinthians 6:12-21

Turn to 1 Corinthians 6. This is the eighth in the series “marriage, celibacy, and bodies.”

In our Scripture today, Paul explains why going to prostitutes is wrong. This is not a big problem in churches around here, and it’s not clear that the Corinthian men were actually doing this either. There were quite a few problems in the Corinthian church, and usually Paul leaves little doubt about what was actually going on there. This section on prostitutes is not like that.

What’s important about these lines is not that Paul thinks using prostitutes is wrong, it’s why he thinks they are wrong. He using a kind of reasoning we would not expect. He does not tell them a rule about sexual immorality, he explains how believers should understand their own bodies, and this we all need to take hold of.

The NIV takes adds a bit to the first few verses, so I am following a more literal translation at the start, the ESV

Everything is Permitted – 1 Corinthians 6:12

Everything is permitted—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permitted—but I will not be mastered by anything.

“Everything is permitted.” Whether the Corinthians or Paul said it first, Paul was willing enough to let it stand, it just can’t be the whole story. Paul probably used it about clean and unclean foods. That was a problem in several early churches, including Corinth, and the basic rule is that when it comes to food and drink, everything is permitted. In Mark 7 Jesus told his disciples twice that nothing going into a person through their mouth could defile them. We can’t say much more about v12. It made sense to the Corinthians, but has been difficult since.

Bodies Temporary and Permanent – 6:13-14

Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both. The body, however, is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

First we will ignore the phrase “is not for sexual immorality,” and then we’ll look at that line separately. Food is made for the stomach, and the stomach is made for food; that’s clear enough. Neither of those will last, however. God will destroy both. We will still eat and drink on the new earth, how else could we be at the wedding banquet, but somehow the relationship between food and our renewed bodies will be completely different. This system will end.

Our bodies and the Lord have the same kind of relationship, somehow, but both are eternal. “*The body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*”

Easter is in two weeks, and this is a great preview. There is something profoundly eternal about our present bodies, failing though they are. It begins with the Lord’s empty tomb. The angels did not roll the stone back to let the Lord out. He was already gone. They rolled the stone back so everyone could see that he was gone.

That body that had been whipped and crucified and nailed up there until Jesus died, that body was cold and dead in the grave, and on Sunday morning that body was changed into an eternal body and came out through the stone. The Lord did not get a new body. He dead body was wonderfully renewed, but tomb was empty, which the old body was changed not left behind.

His resurrected body still had marks of the nails in his hands and feet. You could look at his hands and feet and see clearly that this man had recently been crucified. That crucified mangled body would never suffer or die again. That’s exactly what will happen to everyone of us when the Lord returns. “*By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*”

Jesus has put his eternal stamp on the body of every single believer. His stamp says, “eternity with me,” and it’s on our bodies. Our bodies are not yet eternal, but these very bodies that hold your chair down are destined to be eternal, and as such they belong to the Lord already. We already have the stamp. He died for us so that this would happen to our bodies. “*The body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*”

The Body is Not for Sexual Immorality – 6:13

The Greek word for sexual immorality is *porneia* (por-NAY-ah). In Greek society *porneia* meant business with a prostitute. A man paid a woman for sexual pleasure. Greek society was ambivalent about that, it was sort of harmless, as casual a sexual encounter as one could have.

Greek society was pretty much like the Egyptians and Canaanites of Leviticus 18, they did everything on that list. The early preachers were all devout Jews, and they saw the sexual permissiveness of Greek society as a sad plague. The New Testament writers use *porneia* to refer to all illegitimate sexual behavior, not just going to prostitutes.

When Gentiles came to the Lord, as happened in Corinth and many other places, improving the sexual behavior of the new believers was a long and difficult road. They were not used to resisting sexual temptations. They were not used to the Lord’s teaching on these things. That’s why *porneia* gets mentioned so often. It was such a common problem.

So you can imagine Corinthian men thinking, “Everything is permissible, if this applies to food and stomachs it applies to bodies and prostitutes too. The stomach is for food and the body is for prostitutes, just two different physical appetites.” No, says Paul. The body is for the Lord.

Our Bodies and Christ’s Body – 6:15

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!

In Greek, the word “member” always meant a body part. They did not have committee members or choir members or team members. Members were fingers and toes, eyes and ears, stomach and heart, hands and feet and legs and arms. Those were “members.”

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Picture your body as a finger or a toe, your body as an ear or a nose, your body as a thumb or a tongue or an eye, all belonging to Christ himself. Our bodies are the members of his body. Don’t you know that, says Paul? Well, maybe not.

Shall I take my body, a member of Christ’s body, and unite it with a prostitute?

Let’s picture a believing man, a Christian man, walking down the street in Corinth, and he decides to stop and pay a prostitute and to have sexual relations with her. The body of this believing man is a member of Christ’ body, a finger or a toe or an ear.

When he has sexual relations with that prostitute, he is actually amputating his body from Christ, self-amputation, and grafting his body onto that prostitute’s body. He’s taking a member of Christ’s body away from Christ and uniting it to a prostitute. This believing man has done that to his own body.

The reason Paul talks about prostitutes here is that sexual relations with prostitutes were the most casual sexual relations those people had. There’s no emotional attachment at all, or even attraction to a particular person. It was paying to satisfy an appetite of the body, sort of like going to McDonalds for food. But there is no such thing as casual sex, because two bodies are coming together, and that is never ever casual.

But what are you talking about, Paul? How have we joined our bodies like that to the prostitute? And the answer is in the marriage sentence in Genesis 2. Jesus used it in Matthew 19, Paul in Ephesians and again here:

Remember: The Two Become One Flesh – 6:16-17

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

God first made one flesh, one body. Then God divided the one body into two bodies, male and female, and whenever a man and a woman have sexual relations, that is the most profound way there is for the two to go back to the original one flesh. How attached those two people are emotionally has absolutely no bearing on their becoming one flesh again. On the other hand, let's not kid ourselves, sexual relations always involve the whole person, not just the body.

Sexual union is a profound uniting of bodies. That is how a believing man in Corinth would take his own body, a member of Christ's body, and join it rather to a prostitute's body by becoming one flesh with her. Paul never actually says this, but he implies that that believing man's body cannot be part of Christ's body and at the same time be one flesh with the prostitute.

If you join yourself to a prostitute, the most casual sex possible, you have torn your body from Christ. Paul takes us to this edge, and stops there. But we have done something very dark to our bodies, and that's why Paul says “Never!” It's a terrible thing to do!

Whoever is united to the Lord is one with him in spirit. Our union with Christ is not the same as a sexual union, it is spiritual, but NOT in the sense that it only affects our soul and spirit. By one Spirit we were all baptized into the body of Christ. This baptism includes body, soul and spirit. The Spirit joins our body to Christ's body, so that our bodies and souls are members of his body.

Shall I then take my body, a member of Christ's body, and unite it with a prostitute? Never! And that is why sexual immorality is wrong.

Sinning Against our Own Bodies – 6:18

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

Flee. Often victorious Christian living means run for your life, run like a scared rabbit. Some important battles are won by fleeing.

Most sins involve our bodies in some way, our speech or our actions, but they are still called sins outside the body. But sexual sin is sinning against your own body. Sexual sins are also sins against God, but that's not what God wants to emphasize in this Scripture. Sinful sexual relations with another person are sins against your own body. Not their body, your body.

When Christians debate sexual morality, we don't speak enough about bodies. Right from Genesis 1 and 2, bodies are central. The problem with homosexual relations in Romans 1 gets summarized this way: they dishonour their own bodies with one another, they degrade their own bodies with one another.

The particular relational dynamics involved, they love each other or they do not, are completely secondary. Our bodies are glorious and wonderful, an essential part of the image and likeness of God himself. In same sex relations, people violate their own bodies. It takes two, but it's not the other body they are violating, it is their own.

Shall I take my body, a member of Christ's body, and unite it to a prostitute? Never! Whoever sins sexually sins against their own body.

The Holy Spirit Temple, Bought and Paid For – 6:19-20

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; you were bought at a price.

Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. The only way I ever heard preachers use this was to say we should take better care of our bodies. That is, this line gets used to promote healthy living. What a terrible use of Scripture! I want to rant here, but I won't. Healthy living is fine, but this line has nothing at all to do with healthy living. Nothing. Not on Paul's mind at all.

God does not put his Holy Presence in a borrowed building, and he does not rent. God only puts his Holy Presence in a place he owns outright. No mortgage. Do you and I want to be redeemed, and our sins forgiven? Yes we do. "Redeemed" means bought and paid for; we're not our own. He owns us, people, owns us outright, and on that basis he moved in.

Shall I take my body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and degrade my body the temple with forbidden sexual relations? Shall I take my body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and join it to a prostitute's body, so that the temple of the Holy Spirit becomes one flesh with her? Never! He tells us that our bodies are the temple of the Spirit *so that we will flee sexual immorality*. He tells us that our bodies are the temple of the Spirit *so that we will flee sexual immorality*.

Shall we talk about what God paid to buy us? What God paid so Jesus could put his eternal stamp on our bodies, so that your body and mine are now have his stamp of eternity on them?

Last Sunday evening for about 15 minutes, Marilyn and I daydreamed about buying a piece of useless land in this general area. Something not good for farming or for residential, a place for us and our children to get away and wander around. We were thinking to leave it to our kids.

So Marilyn looked up properties online, and I calculated how much money we could manage to put toward this. The calculation took about 45 seconds. We laughed and gave up. There was no way we could meet the price, and we're too old to go into debt again. The price was too high.

If what God paid, so he could own our bodies and souls for eternity, if that payment would not have been enough, I don't think God could have done it at all. He didn't have anything more valuable than his Son. Paul skips over the actual price of buying us, because they and we know very well what the price was. Your bodies and mine were unbelievably expensive, even for God.

The body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Our bodies have his stamp: "this body with me for eternity." *Therefore, my brothers and sisters, let's honor God with our bodies – 6:21.*
Amen.

PRAYER: O God, what a great salvation we have. What hope we have, what confidence. No wonder we are more than conquerors, just because you loved us. We praise you and thank you. We ask for strength to grasp your love, how wide and long and high and deep it is, your unknowable love which you have shown us through Christ. What a great salvation. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.