

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Glorify God In Your Body

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1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6:12; that's on page 955 in your pew Bible. In this passage the Apostle Paul is continuing to address his primary concern: there is way too much "world" in the Christian church at Corinth. They have adopted unthinkingly the moral values of their culture – these people don't understand yet that believing in Jesus changes EVERYTHING about how we live here and now on planet earth. Paul is rebuking them for their worldly attitudes concerning sex and his rebuke is as needed in the church today as it was when it was first written. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹²“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:12–20 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

The wording of this text is a little bit complicated so I think the best approach will be for us to spend some time making sure that we understand the text and then because of the urgent nature of the issue we'll also want to leave some extended time for a discussion about practical and personal application.

First of all then in terms of understanding the text, I want to draw your attention to verses 12-14.

Understanding The Text (V. 12-14)

While scholars and translators differ as to the exact quotations that Paul is referencing and the exact rebukes that he is offering in response, everybody agrees that he is rebuking beliefs they have unthinkingly adopted from Greco-Roman culture. From their quotes and from Paul's rebukes, I want you to notice the following:

1. Bad theology results in bad behaviour

We need to notice that Paul doesn't say: "You folks are sleeping with prostitutes because you lack self control". He doesn't say that, he says: "You folks are sleeping with prostitutes because you have bad theology". That's important. Here is something you need to know about people – behind every bad behaviour lies a defective belief. Paul goes right after those defective beliefs. The heart of their error has to do with the nature of physical life. Very much like everyone else in Greek culture they have foolishly adopted a dualistic view of the world. Meaning, they have divided the world into categories of physical and spiritual. They think that physical is temporary and spiritual is eternal. They think that physical is unimportant and spiritual is important. A typical Greek – newly converted to Christianity – would say to himself: "Jesus has saved my soul! My soul will spend eternity now with God in heaven. What I do with my body in the meantime, however, is really not that important." That very common belief led to two different errors in the Corinthian church. Some Christians – like those being addressed here at the end of chapter 6 – believed that it was therefore just fine to have sex with prostitutes. Why not? My soul is saved; my body will perish with the earth, in the meantime, I have to feed my body with food and sex while feeding my spirit with the things of the Lord. We might label this error as "permissiveness". Then on the other hand, there was another group at Corinth that Paul will correct in chapter 7. They had a very negative and hostile view on the body because of this same

defective belief. They thought that everything to do with the body was bad and should therefore be avoided so as to nourish and feed the soul. These people thought that people should avoid all sex whatsoever – even married people with each other – we might label this error as “asceticism”. Both are wrong. Both are bad behaviours flowing from bad theology. Paul introduces the corrective truth in verses 13-14 when he says:

¹³The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and **the Lord for the body**. ¹⁴And God raised the Lord and **will also raise us up** by his power. (1 Corinthians 6:13–14 ESV)

Paul says that Jesus died and rose again in a body to redeem the physical not just the spiritual. If all God cared about was the spiritual then Jesus need never have risen bodily from the dead. But he did and so will you. You will not spend all eternity floating around heaven as a disembodied spirit. You will spend all eternity on the new earth in a resurrected body therefore, just to be clear – what we do in the body really does matter. Humans have always been and will always be embodied creatures. Don’t ever forget that Paul says. What we do in the body matters.

Secondly, I want you to notice that:

2. The heart is deceitful above all things – and desperately wicked, who can know it?

We lie to ourselves. We lie to ourselves when we want to move or cross the lines. Paul basically quotes back to them the silly and transparently stupid things that they have been saying to justify their bad behaviour. They’ve been saying: “I am the master of this action – it doesn’t control me, I control it; its only sin when I can’t stop.” Fools! Everyone who sins is a slave to sin, Jesus said that¹. You think you are playing a game; you think you are in control; you don’t realize you are dancing to the siren’s song. You are being led by the nose into the very depths of hell and ruin. You are not playing the game; the game is playing you.

We lie to ourselves when we want to deny our own conscience. You need to know that. You need to know that you are not capable of deciding right and wrong – you are not capable of complex moral reasoning – especially when pretty ladies are involved. You are also not capable of assessing harm – especially when pleasure is in view. Paul says that in his rebuke – NOT ALL

¹ John 8:34.

THINGS ARE BENEFICIAL. It seems that the Corinthian Christians had decided – at least some of them – that sleeping with a prostitute was essentially a victimless crime. She got paid, you got what you wanted – no one was hurt, therefore, no sin was committed. Fools! You hurt yourself in ways you don't even know, you hurt her, in ways you obviously don't understand, you hurt your wife in ways you obviously haven't thought about and you have defamed Christ – making the church as no better than the nations. There is no such thing as a victimless crime. That is a lie we choose to believe when we want to cross the line.

This should not have happened Paul says. You shouldn't be listening to culture and you shouldn't be listening to yourselves. You would never have done this if you remembered what you were taught and if you paid attention to who you are. That is the argument that Paul makes now in verses 15-20.

Understanding The Text (V. 15-20)

First of all we hear him saying twice: “Do you not know?” This is a rhetorical way of saying – “You should have known, because you were taught!” The words of verse 15 and following seem to indicate that the Corinthians should have known two things:

3. You should have known....

- i. That believers are members of Christ's body. Therefore sex with a prostitute is violence against Jesus

Look at verse 15:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then **take the members of Christ** and make them members of a prostitute? Never! (1 Corinthians 6:15 ESV)

Given the strong force of the Greek word translated here as “take” one commentator suggests the following paraphrase:

“Shall I then tear from Christ his limbs and organs and make them the limbs and organs of a prostitute?”²

²Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 258.

Paul is reminding them that when he was with them he taught them about union with Christ. A believer is made a member of Christ's body – he will make use of that metaphor extensively in chapter 12; here he simply makes the point that you are a part of something that has no interest in being joined to sin and immorality. Christ will not let go of you – will you then force him into contact with that which is unclean? Will you assault Christ to satisfy sexual passions? Never! Not if you love the Lord. What you do now, believer, touches Christ. He has put his Spirit in you. Remember that and conduct yourselves accordingly.

Secondly, he says you ought to have known:

- ii. That sex is for making two things into one thing. Therefore you pollute yourself through wrongful sexual intercourse.

That seems to be the force of the quotation he inserts:

For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” (1 Corinthians 6:16 ESV)

Of course Paul is quoting from Genesis 2:24. In contrast to their view of sex as merely being a physical need of the body – akin to eating food – Paul says that sex is something far more powerful than that. It was given by God to facilitate the union of two people into one. Let's just pause and hear that. The Bible says that sex is given to help two people begin to think and feel as one flesh. It is an aid to friendship. Now I would imagine that God made it pleasurable so that we would not neglect it. However pleasure is not the point. Union is the point. People are not naturally good at thinking as a pair. We are selfish and narcissistic to a fault. Sex helps with that. It strips away the layers of dissimulation and pretension and it helps us to know and to be known. It opens a transfer between bodies and souls. It creates a channel for the mingling of essence. Its beautiful and powerful and dangerous. You can LOSE YOURSELF in sexual intimacy. You should lose yourself in sexual intimacy but you should do that with your spouse – you should not do that with a prostitute. It is a reckless thing³ - physically and spiritually to consort with prostitutes; to commit any act of sexual immorality. Paul says, “You think having sex with strangers is no big deal – fools! You ought to have known that this physical act puts

³ Paul seems to have in mind a contemporary Jewish writing, which says: “Wine and women lead intelligent men astray, and the man who consorts with prostitutes is reckless.” (Sirach 19:2 NRSV)

body and soul in mortal danger. Do you not know?”

Paul’s final argument is an argument from identity. In verses 19-20 he tells them:

4. **Be who you are**

¹⁹Or do you not know that **your body** is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. (1 Corinthians 6:19–20 ESV)

He reminds them first of all that:

- i. They are, each of them, the temple of the Holy Spirit

The “your body” there is in the singular. He had said back in chapter 3:

Do you not know that **you are** God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16 ESV)

That “you” is plural so Paul is teaching in chapter 3 that the church collectively is the temple of the Lord and then here in chapter 6 he is saying that the individual believer is the temple of the Lord. The Holy Spirit lives inside the individual believer and he lives inside the church. We are the temple of the Lord. It doesn’t matter one little bit whether they ever rebuilt that fallen tabernacle of stone that sits in Old Jerusalem – God’s Spirit isn’t there anymore – now he makes his home inside the church. Corporately and individually – God’s Spirit lives in us! Therefore, you should be holy. Don’t bring the sex idol of the nations into the temple of the Lord. That’s been done – in the Old Testament, to disastrous effect. God did not and does not share space.

Secondly, he reminds them that:

- ii. They are the redeemed and ransomed of the Lord

You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. (1 Corinthians 6:19–20 ESV)

Paul summons the imagery of the slave market. You were once a slave to death and sin. The devil owned you. He owned your future, he owned your body and he owned your soul. But God

bought you back. At great cost to himself – GOD BOUGHT YOU BACK! Is this how you repay him? By lusting after your former owner? By acting the slave, even though you are free? Be who you are! A slave ransomed and saved and made a son and a daughter of the king should live a life characterized by gratitude, thankfulness and obedience to the master to whom so much is owed. God bought you back – be loyal to him!

Paul is almost certainly quoting or thinking of Hosea 3:2-3. God told his prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. He did but it brought him great hardship. She went back to whoring and it embarrassed Hosea greatly. He could have let her go – he would have been within his rights to divorce her and marry another. But instead he went and bought her back. He brought her home and said to her:

“You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.” (Hosea 3:3 ESV)

Come back. Be faithful to me as I will be to you. This is who God is. He is the husband who has bought us out of prostitution and slavery to sin and death and he has made us privileged, loved and free. We don’t need to play the whore anymore. We are different now, because of Christ. We should be what we are.

And being what we are and knowing what we should have known, let us now agree together to flee from sexual immorality and to glorify God in our bodies. That is the application that Paul intends for us to make from this passage and so let’s end where it seems, quite clearly, he wants us to end. The most common application of a Biblical teaching in the New Testament is the call to repent. If this is true, then stop doing that and start doing this. That’s where Paul ends this passage as well.

Applying The Text:

He tell us to:

- 1. Flee sexual immorality**
- 2. Glorify God in our bodies**

The command to flee sexual immorality is probably a reference to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39. Paul uses the same Greek word for flee that is used in the LXX of Genesis 39:12. Joseph forcibly extricates himself from the grip of his temptress – even fleeing naked and leaving his clothing behind in her grasp. He takes extreme measures to safeguard his purity. That's what Paul is saying; you need to take extreme measures. Let me get very practical and provide 2 drastic measures that you could take to safeguard your purity in our sex-crazed world.

i. Confession

Normally, all confession is to God as the most wronged party. However, the Bible also connects confession to spiritual break through and healing. Confession to another Christian can be the extreme measure that breaks the death grip of a sexual addiction in your life. Sin thrives in the dark. Dragging it out into the light and confessing it to another robs it of much of its power. I know this to be true. I've experienced the power of confession. I think there can be too much confession in the church today and I think there can be too little. I think some people confess too much to too many people but I know, from the Bible and from experience that sometimes, with certain types of sin, confession – to your spouse and to one or two trusted same gender Christian brothers or sisters, can be the nuclear bomb that breaks the hold of sin in your life. That's in the Bible; James 5. Let me put it this way, if you want to stop, have tried to stop and you can't stop – seriously consider the trauma of confession. It will destroy your pride, it will destroy your carefully constructed façade of respectability and it will just about destroy your soul. But. If you survive it, you very well may be healed. I've read about it in the Bible and I've experienced it first hand – personally and pastorally.

ii. Distance

Control the distance. You can't control the fact that temptations exist in our culture. They do. You can however control how close those temptations live to you. You can install distance on your computer via accountability programs and passwords that only your spouse knows and all sorts of simple little things like that. Distance is absolutely critical. If you are going to stay up late, surfing the internet all by yourself down in your basement then, let's not all act surprised

when bad things come out of the dark and steal your soul. Duh. That's where bad things live. For crying out loud – RUN AWAY! Put your computer in a well travelled space with lots of light and turn it off when the last person in your house goes to bed. At least make the devil come to you. The devil is a dog on a chain, you ought to be able to outrun him unless you are stupid enough to stand in his shade. Be a coward and run away. Flee sexual immorality.

More positively, Paul tells us to glorify God in our bodies.

How do we do that? We teach our kids in catechism class that we glorify God by loving him and doing what he commands⁴. Listen to me, you can love God by fleeing from sexual immorality. When you turn your back on opportunities for sinful pleasure you say to all the watching world – “God is enough – he is all my desire and delight!” The devil doesn't believe that anybody loves God more than they love pleasure and more often than not, he is absolutely right. He was right about Eve. He showed her the forbidden fruit and how it was beautiful and much to be desired and she took and ate it and she gave it to her husband who was with her and he ate also. They saw, they desired. They took and they ate. Show the devil that the grace of God in you is stronger than Adam's seed! Glorify the grace of God – shut the mouth of the mocker by choosing Christ over sexual immorality. Do you want to glorify God? Say no to the flesh and say yes to Christ. Love God with your body.

And do what he commands. There are two commands with respect to human sexuality in the Genesis narrative that Paul has already referred to; one he has quoted in the text:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
(Genesis 2:24 ESV)

You can glorify God by obeying him and by becoming one flesh with your spouse. That is a command that you can obey and if you obey it you will know God better and love God more. God created man and woman in his image – in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God created us in a way that would help us know and love him. God is a single entity who exists in perpetual relationship within himself. That fact is illustrated in the very words that God uses to express his creative intent:

⁴ Faith Foundations, Part 3, Question 4.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. (Genesis 1:26 ESV)

God is a plurality of persons and yet one God. This is a mystery and yet it is not a distant mystery. After all we are a plurality of persons and yet, in marriage, one flesh. It is not exactly the same but it is a likeness. And the implication is that as we become one flesh with our spouse – as we begin to think and feel as one and yet two – we can begin to understand – we can just begin to grasp the immensity and the beauty of God’s character as Three In One. Having sex – growing in oneness; loving your spouse – helps you to know and love God. It is one of the ways we glorify God; and if I may, its one of the more fun ways. Listen, I’m not sure I would ever preach a sermon “Why Christians Have Sex” but if I did, this would be the passage I would use. The text is telling us more than that, but not less. It is telling us that Christians have sex – inside marriage – to develop and nurture a “one flesh” identity with our spouse and to glorify God in our bodies. That’s why we have sex and that’s why we don’t have sex with prostitutes and strangers. Becoming one flesh with your spouse will help you understand what it means to be one spirit with the Lord.

There is also another command in Genesis concerning sexual intimacy that we should see:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion (Genesis 1:28 ESV)

God sanctioned sex within marriage in part – not only and not primarily, but in part – to secure a holy seed to fill the earth and to have dominion. That concern is never far from God’s mind. We read about it last week in our RMM readings:

Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. (Malachi 2:15 ESV)

When you have sex outside your marriage – you dishonor the wife of your youth – and you disobey the will of the Lord. God is seeking holy offspring. Children born to godly parents. When you channel the sex drive outside of a holy union you assault that aspect of God’s perfect plan. God means to rule the world through pure seed. That’s what this text says. Do you want to glorify God by obeying him in your body? Then guard yourself in your spirit – take extreme

measures – flee sexual immorality and glorify God in your body.

Very practically, have sex with your wife – let two become one flesh. Have children. Be fruitful and multiply – I think that means have many children. Be a good dad and a good husband. Be a good wife and a good mother. Both of those will help your children – and you – know and love the Lord. Lead your children to Jesus and give to God a holy seed.

If you are single – then be a holy seed. Be the temple and the people of the Lord. Show the watching world that the grace of God is greater than the lusts of the flesh. You are not your own. You were bought with a price now glorify God in your bodies. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.