

Why Marriage Matters (part 3)  
“My Body, God’s Home”  
I Corinthians 6:12-20  
February 25, 2001  
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Josh and Stacey have dated since their sophomore year in college. They both love the Lord and are actively involved in a campus evangelism ministry.

They are now nearing graduation and are engaged to be married soon after.

Stacey still lives in the dorm at school, but Josh has his own apartment.

For several months now Stacey has stayed at Josh’s place at least a couple of nights each week.

They were always taught that premarital sex was wrong but they aren’t so certain anymore.

They fight feelings of guilt every time but they also don’t want to quit if it really isn’t so wrong.

After all God made us the way we are and the desire for sex is natural and healthy – what’s so wrong about it, that we call it sin?

For that matter is it really wrong for two 17 year olds to explore their sexuality?

Is it really a sin for a young couple to have sex before their wedding?

If I asked those questions in a context other than in church, I might get a different response or at least a more thoughtful one.

If you think these questions can be answered lightly then you haven’t lived 35 years unmarried.

You haven’t lived for the past 15 years with a sexually unresponsive spouse.

You don’t remember how hard it is to be 17, with hormones raging through your body, and being sexually stimulated by almost every television show, movie, magazine and advertisement you see.

Not only is the world saying “Why not?”

But much of popular culture is saying, “What are you waiting for?”

Within the past couple of weeks I saw a few minutes of a show called “Friends”.

Two of the characters laughingly decided to go to bed together for some recreational sex with as little thought as they would have given to playing a game of tennis.

The message was clear: this is perfectly acceptable and even normal behavior.

For the past two weeks I have been addressing the issue of “honoring marriage”.

God says in Hebrews 13:4, “Marriage should be honored by all..”

Another way of stating the first part of Hebrews 13:4 is “Let marriage be precious to all of you.”

Today again I wish to ask the question, how do we honor marriage or how do we treat it as precious?

The answer in part in Hebrews 13:4 is that we honor marriage by controlling our sexuality.

“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

“The marriage bed” is a phrase from one word in the Greek and that word is the same word from which we get the English word “coitus” or sexual intercourse.

“Kept pure” is a word from the religious language of the day – having to do with the perfect spotless animals that were offered in sacrifice.

The instruction is that marriage should be honored by all by making certain that sexual intercourse is reserved only for its very special use.

Then the author makes clear what is NOT proper: adultery and any other form of sexual immorality.

Most of us are quite familiar with strong statements from both the Old and New Testaments that condemn adultery.

But the author of Hebrews uses another term in addition to “adultery” – “the sexually immoral”.

That term is a very inclusive term meaning all other sexual conduct.

The point is quite clear – any sexual relationship outside of a marriage is forbidden.

That is the way the marriage bed is kept pure.

**Even our culture thinks of adultery as wrong – although for insufficient reason as I will show later.**

But what about premarital sex?

What about any sex between unmarried people?

Is that really wrong?

Certainly the Hebrews verses ought to answer those questions.

But some still argue there is no specific verse that condemns it like other verses condemn adultery.

**But they forget verses like Deuteronomy 22:20-21 “If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the girl’s virginity can be found, she shall be brought to the door of her father’s house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death. She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by being promiscuous while still in her father’s house. You must purge the evil from among you.”**

But even such overt statements as these from the Scriptures didn’t seem to convince some in the Apostle Paul’s day and so he wrote a rather lengthy passage on the issue of our sexual conduct.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

I am not so naïve as to think that simply telling people that something is wrong is sufficient to keep them from doing it.

Here in 1 Corinthians the Spirit of God will use the Word of God to convince us of God’s will and shape our wills to conform.

Notice I didn’t say he would force us to conform but would shape our wills to desire to obey.

Again the question: "Are all sexual relations outside of the one man, one woman covenant of marriage really wrong?"

READ I Corinthians 6:12-20

To understand this text we will have to do some work.

The farmer says to his sons, "Get the ladder boys, the best apples on this tree aren't going to fall to the ground for us, we'll have to go get them."

Let's go get them!

In verse 12 Paul twice quotes a slogan, apparently an oft'-repeated remark of the Corinthians:

"Everything is permissible for me."

The original intention of the slogan ("Everything is permissible for me") might have been rather harmless and in fact might have made an important theological point.

Surely Paul would agree with the Scriptures that people are saved by Grace through faith not by the keeping of the law.

Furthermore Paul taught that Christians are no longer under the law - we are not obligated to keep the law in order to gain or keep our relationship to God.

Or to say it differently, "We're free from the law" or "Everything is permissible for me."

What "Law" was Paul talking about?

If he was talking about the ceremonial laws of the Jewish religion - circumcision, sacrifices, holy days, certain offerings, special dietary restrictions, and so on, then it would be right to say I'm not restricted by those laws any longer, "Everything is permissible for me."

But of course, while Christians are not obligated to keep the ceremonial law of Judaism, Paul did not mean that Christians are no longer under any obligation to keep the moral law of God.

I don't think most Christians today have gone quite so far to say that everything is permissible (I doubt even the Corinthians meant "everything").

But many today will say everything is permissible as long as it is done with "love" or doesn't hurt anyone else.

Somehow everything is supposed to be okay as long as the two love each other or as long as they are consenting adults.

But Paul turns the whole thing around by adding to the slogan.

Everything is permissible for me "but not everything is beneficial."

Paul says I don't want you to think just in terms of what you can "get by with" but in terms of what is constructive - what is helpful - what will build up you, others and the kingdom of God.

**Several years ago my daughter Stephanie found one of those slogan buttons you wear on your shirt – On it was written:**

"How much sin can I get away with and still go to heaven."

The question is not how much freedom do I have to sin **but** what can I do to honor my Lord.

The question is not "how far can I go sexually and still be o.k.?"

The question is "How can I use my body to truly honor God and others."

**Secondly in verse 12 Paul writes, "Everything is permissible for me"--but I will not be mastered by anything.**

After again quoting the popular slogan Paul refutes it by saying that in the name of freedom you think you can do anything but you don't understand that the wrong use of freedom actually leads instead to slavery.

How many Americans are mastered by their "rights".

**They've become so convinced that they must exercise their rights that they have become enslaved by them.**

If there is anything that you will not or cannot give up – you have become a slave to that – it is controlling you.

William Barclay wrote, "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." (p56-57 in 1 Corinthians)

Not only did the Corinthians have a wrong understanding of what is permissible; they also had a wrong idea about their physical bodies. And that wrong thinking about their bodies allowed them to rationalize their sexual immorality.

**Now again it is interesting how similar is the thinking of some Christians today.**

To see how Paul develops this idea I want you to look at verses 13-14.

You will notice in the NIV translation there are quotes around the words:

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"  
Apparently this was another slogan among the Corinthians.

There is a little Greek word "d e" (de) that is a conjunction that can be translated either "and" or "but".

That little conjunction appears several times in these verses in the original Greek language and translators must make a decision about whether to use "and" or "but" or sometimes even to leave it out to make the sentence read more smoothly.

Let me show you verses 14 and 15 with all the conjunctions left in.

**"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"—  
(AND)/but God will destroy them both. (BUT) The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (AND) By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.**

**When I leave those conjunctions in we see more clearly an outline of these sentences that demonstrates the contrast.**

**"Food for the stomach**

**And the stomach for food”  
AND God will destroy them both.**

**BUT (here is Paul’s response)  
The body is (not meant for sexual immorality but) for the Lord  
And the Lord for the body.  
AND by his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and  
he will raise us also.**

When we put all the conjunctions in we see a parallel between the first part of this section, the slogan, and the second, Paul's response, that will help greatly in explaining it.

**Paul says you Corinthians have it almost all wrong.**

I think the Corinthian rationale went something like this:

Desiring food is a natural appetite.

And the stomach is made to have food and food is made to be used by the stomach.

Likewise, the argument would go:

Sexual desire is a natural appetite.

And sex is made for the body and the body for sex.

And since food and the stomach and sex and the body will perish anyway, neither food nor sex have any eternal or spiritual significance and therefore it doesn't ultimately matter what we do.

Paul says "wait a minute!"

It may be true that food by its very definition is designed to be eaten and that the stomach is uniquely designed to consume food.

But you have made a serious mistake in jumping to the same conclusion about the body.

Paul says the body is meant for the Lord.

Even today we are tempted to use the Corinthian logic:

God made me the way I am.

God made me with sexual desires.

Surely he intended that those be fulfilled just as surely as he intended that because I have a stomach I should eat.

And if God doesn't allow me to fulfill my sexual desires in the context of a marriage then it must be okay that I fulfill them otherwise.

Your body was not made just for sex and certainly not for sexual immorality, it was made for the Lord.

In today's culture we have turned the human body into little or nothing more than an object of physical desire.  
And much advertising reinforces that idea.

We see another person's body as an object on which we can feed our desires.

Bodies exist, we begin to think, just to meet our needs, our rights.

"No!" Paul says, Your body is for the Lord.

Just as the Corinthians, we have a hard time grasping that.

In our thinking we have created a kind of "dualism":

There is my physical body and then there is the real me.

We think, "My body is dying anyway, it will be destroyed so what I do with it doesn't have eternal significance.

Paul says, "You're wrong!"

God isn't going to destroy your body; He is going to resurrect it!  
Just as certainly as he raised Jesus from the dead with his body so he will raise us from the dead with our bodies.

God didn't just create our spiritual natures - He created our bodies, He redeemed our bodies, and he will resurrect our bodies from the grave.

On the same idea, jump ahead with me to verses 19-20:

"Do you not know that your body is a temple 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."

Don't miss this: What is Paul talking about here?

Does he say only your soul or your personality is the temple of the Holy Spirit?

No. He says your **body**, your physical body, is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit of God as surely as the physical Jewish temple in Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God 3000 years ago.

Furthermore when he says, "You were bought at a price" what is he talking about?

Yes, that Jesus died for you - He paid for you with his life.

But again, don't miss it: What did he die for? Your soul only?

No. He died for your body, your physical body, that body in which God the Holy Spirit now dwells- That body which he created, that body which he redeemed and that body which he will resurrect from the dead.

Your body counts with God.

Here's an unusual thought for you: God loves your body.

He is rightly jealous for the proper use of your body.

Why not engage in sexual immorality?

Because your body belongs to the Lord and has eternal significance.

God loves it and died for it and will resurrect it to be with him for eternity.

Now in verses 15-16 Paul takes that truth (Your body is for the Lord) and applies it very specifically so we can't miss the point.

In verse 15, **your body**, (not just your personality - your soul), but your physical body, that he has been talking about all along, **is a member (a part) of Christ himself.**

In some way, which I don't think is fully explained here or elsewhere, our physical bodies are linked to Christ himself.

If you are a Christian your physical body belongs to the Lord and are in fact linked to him – part of him.

Then in the 15th verse he asks the unthinkable:

Can we even imagine taking a part of Christ himself and linking him with a prostitute?

Prostitution was evidently the particular sexual immorality that was most rampant in Corinth but the text and context are clear that all sexual immorality is in view here.

**Now verse 16 and the central reason why any sex outside of marriage is immoral:**

Don't you realize that when you unite sexually with another person you become one with that person physically, "you become one with them in body" or as the Old Testament put it "the two become one flesh".

Lewis Smedes wrote, "It does not matter what two people have in mind. The reality of the sexual act, unfelt and unnoticed by them, is this: it unites them – body and soul – to each other..."(Lewis Smedes pg 32-32 cited by Tim Stafford in Christianity Today 31, 24-26 October 2, 1987)

It is clear to me that Paul says while sexual intercourse is a physical act it is much more than that.

**Every use of the phrase "the two shall become one flesh" in the Scriptures refers to the covenant marriage relationship.**

Sexual intercourse becomes in some ways synonymous with marriage.

A oneness of flesh was designed by God to mirror a oneness of spirit -

Two becoming one in the permanent covenant relationship of marriage is expressed in the two becoming one physically.

God's intention is that the **physical** union and the **spiritual** union of the covenant of marriage be inseparably linked.

In God's plan for us, the one without the other is a desecration of both.

British author Os Guinness wrote:

This is **the ideal** that judges all the rest of Christian sexual ethics in the Scriptures. That is what is behind every (sexual) prohibition.

Why should people not sleep with animals?

Why is adultery wrong?

Why are homosexual practices wrong?

Why is pre-marital intercourse wrong?

**Simply because the sex act and the covenant of marriage are part and parcel of the same relationship and any separation of them is a desecration of both.**

Don't for a minute think this verse is talking only against prostitution. Prostitution was, evidently, the particular problem in the Corinthian church but to think that is all Paul is speaking about is just silly.

Paul could just as easily have said, "He who joins himself to the good-looking housewife down the street" **or** "She who joins herself to the good-looking athlete down the stairs" is one with her or him in body and that is a complete violation of the intention of sexual intercourse.

This passage of Scripture makes it clear than any sex outside of the covenant of marriage is immoral.

Look at verse 17.

The truth is, if you are a Christian, you have been linked to Christ.

You are one with him.

Remember back to verse 15? "Shall I take a member of Christ (for that is what I am) and unite myself (and thus unite Christ) with another in an immoral way?"

This is strong but I think it is what Paul is saying, **“Would I force Christ, of whom I am member, into a sexual relationship outside of the God ordained relationship of a covenant marriage?”**

Why shouldn't Josh and Stacey sleep together?

Because sex is the “one flesh” relationship that is always in Scripture reserved for the covenant of marriage.

Or to put it more simply they shouldn't sleep together because they aren't married to each other.

Why shouldn't a Christian woman commit adultery?

Not only because she is thereby breaking a covenant but also because she is linking the Lord, of whom she is a member, to another person in an immoral relationship.

Why shouldn't a man go to bed with a prostitute?

Because his body belongs to the Lord and because his body is a member of Christ's body and to have sex outside of the relationship of the covenant of marriage is to link both himself and the Lord to another person in an immoral relationship.

I haven't time to comment further, but look how Paul ends this instruction:

“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple 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. Therefore honor God with your body.”