

## MY BODY, GOD'S HOME

(sexuality; marriage; family)

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I Cor 6:12-20

Do you remember the name "Heidi Fleiss"?

She's been in the news lately.

Not because she's famous but because she's notorious.

She's been called the "Hollywood Madam".

She has allegedly been operating a prostitution business with the high and mighty, the celebrities of Los Angeles.

Her situation has once again raised the issue of whether prostitution should be illegal.

Apparently the movie "Pretty Woman" released a year or two ago has the net effect of making the same argument.

The whole enterprise of prostitution is shown as harmless.

Most states haven't changed their laws yet, but there is a growing percentage of the population that would call prostitution a "victimless" crime.

And many today would ask, "What's so wrong with it, if no one gets hurt?"

That kind of thinking enters into the thoughts of Christians as well.

No I don't mean many Christians have gotten to the place where they think prostitution is o.k. - though we might be surprised at how many Christians would think it is o.k. under certain circumstances.

What I do mean is that there is a gradual lowering of the standards among Christians about what constitutes sexual sin.

I have heard so often:

"Well there's nothing worse about sexual sins than other sins!"

Or

"Its just prudishness that has caused the church to make sexual sins the unpardonable sins."

Or

"Surely, a lonely widow woman finding some companionship is not as bad as slander or price gouging."

Or

"The church seems to make a bigger deal out of two high school kids having premarital sex than it does about gossip or cheating."

The implication seems to be that since we don't make a "big deal" out of other sins, why should we make a big deal out of sexual sins.

It is as if the argument is that since we've lowered our standards in other areas why don't we do the same in this area.

I don't think the church, at least this church, has made a bigger deal out of sexual sins than other sins, but even if it had, the answer would not be in lowering the standards regarding sexuality but in raising them regarding other kinds of sins.

But again, the popular question seems to be: "What's so wrong with some sexual conduct that we call it "sin"?"

I mean, are two 16 year olds exploring their sexuality all that wrong?

Why should a young couple, planning on getting married anyway, be told "it's a sin" for them to have sex before the wedding?

As long as he takes precautions, what's so wrong with a man, away on business for weeks or months, having a little secret affair or some sexual recreation?

"What's so wrong with it?"

"Why shouldn't a person engage in these practices?"

Now, if I asked you that same question in some other context than a church worship service I suspect I might get a different response or at least a more thoughtful one.

I fear that in this setting we are tempted to just quickly say,  
 "Well, we just shouldn't that's all!"  
 Or "Because God said not to!"

Well if God saying "not to" is enough reason for you it means either you are very mature (and I suspect for some of you that is very true) or for others it means you are incredibly naive.

If it is naiveté it probably means you have not lived 5 or 10 lonely years after the loss of your partner through death or divorce.

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 was to be 17, with hormones raging through your body, and being sexually stimulated by almost every T.V. show, movie, magazine and advertisement you saw.

Not only is the world saying "Why not?" but much of popular culture is shouting, "What are you waiting for?"

This weeks episode of the most popular new television drama, E.R. had an intensely intimate and blatantly immoral scene in it and the message was clear: This is perfectly acceptable and desirable behavior.

Almost all people including Christians live with the sexual tension between what we ought to think and do what we are tempted to do and think .

Yes, there are many Christians who have learned to deal with it very constructively.

But there are many who struggle deeply.

And for them "Just say no!" is not enough.

There are many reasons for sexual abstinence outside of marriage:

Unwanted pregnancies, disease such as AIDS, embarrassment, or loyalty, among others.

But have you noticed how any one of those or all of those combined have not stopped the rising rate of sexual immorality even among Christians.

Why not? I'm convinced it is because "just saying no" is not enough.

Yes, I think we can suppress sexual immorality in the culture by changing the culture,

by again making certain sexual conduct the kind which everyone frowns upon,

and by inhibiting some of the blatantly sexual stimuli from the popular media (and if someone cries "First Amendment violation - I would respond that we already restrict such freedoms, it is only a matter of where we draw the line).

But while we can and should suppress sexual immorality in the culture, we will not deal with the root of it until we deal with the hearts of men and women.

What can help us live as God meant us to?

What has the power to help us control ourselves?

My conviction is that it is the indwelling Spirit of God using the truth of the Word of God that will enable us to be sexually pure.

The instruction on morality that God gives in I Corinthians 6 is to Christians - true Christians - ones in whom the Spirit of God lives.

I don't think the Apostle Paul expects the instruction he here gives to influence the unconverted whether they are 16, 26 or 46 and even if they are living in your home.

Arguments to suppress their immoral behavior will have to be different than what you will find here.

Here God is talking to you who love the Lord Jesus

Here the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to convince us of God's will and shape our wills to conform.

Notice I didn't say "force" us to conform but "shape our wills" to desire to obey.

Again the question: "Why not be involved sexually outside of marriage?"

In your program today is a white piece of paper on which I have outlined the passage of Scripture we will study today.

I'd like you to open your Bible to the same passage and follow along carefully as I attempt to represent accurately God's Word as here given by God's Spirit.

I can never remember if it is motivational speaker Charles T. (Tremendous) Jones or Zig Zigler that refers to "stinkin' thinkin'" - that kind of thinking that puts a person on a wrong course of action.

To answer the "Why not?" the Apostle Paul challenges some of the "stinking' thinkin'" of the Corinthians.

In verse 12 he twice quotes a slogan, apparently an often repeated remark of theirs:

"Everything is permissible for me."

From Paul's point of view that was "stinkin' thinkin'".

The original intention of the slogan 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 insure 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? The ceremonial laws of the Jewish religion - circumcision, sacrifices, holy days, certain offerings, special dietary restrictions, and so on, so that it would be right to say for example, "all food is permissible for me."

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

Yet apparently the Corinthians had selective hearing:

They must have thought: "If I'm saved by grace then what I do with my body doesn't matter."

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 o.k. 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.

My daughter Stephanie found one of those slogan buttons you wear on your shirt - This one said:

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

Paul would want us to be rid of that "stinkin' thinkin'".

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"

Now a second time Paul quotes the slogan:

"Everything is permissible for me."

That word "permissible" is a word that has the idea of "legal" or "within my power or rights"

"Everything is within my rights."

It is sickening how modern Americans have jumped on that idea.

Even Christians will talk about their right to do certain things. In their thinking, their right to happiness, or fun, or companionship is a higher right than their obligation to the moral law of God.

How many times in the midst of sin do we convince ourselves we have a right to whatever we think that action will yield.

But again Paul counters the slogan by adding to it:  
"Everything is permissible for me but I will not be mastered by anything."

How many Americans are mastered by, enslaved by, their "rights". They've become so convinced they must fulfill their rights that they have become a slave to those rights.

For example, I think even many Christians think they have a right to sexual fulfillment.

But consider this: If there is anything I cannot or will not give up it is that which enslaves me - it is controlling me.

If personal freedom, your rights, or your right to choose have become the dominant values in your life - then they have taken you captive.

Paul did not want to be mastered or enslaved by anything so that he could be free to follow Christ.

If you have a false definition of freedom, it will lead you into sexual immorality.

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." (p 56-7)

Not only did the Corinthians have a wrong understanding of "freedom" they also had a wrong idea of the human body.

And that false understanding of the human body also led them into 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 and then at the way I have diagrammed them on the white sheet.

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

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"

Apparently as in verse 12 this is a slogan among the Corinthians.

Because there is no punctuation in the Greek, from which this is translated, it is difficult to tell exactly where the quote ends.

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

You will notice in verse 13 the NIV translators chose to translate that little word as "but" when they finished the sentence.

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" BUT God will destroy them both.

The change I am going to suggest to you doesn't make the NIV wrong but it does help make clearer what Paul is saying.

Since that little Greek word can be translated either "and" or "but" lets translate it as "and" instead.

Now the slogan Paul is quoting reads, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy them both."

Look now at the next phrase: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality"

The NIV translators, not improperly, left out a little word at the beginning of this sentence - the word "de" - "and" or "but".

Look next at the beginning of the 14th verse: "By his power God raised..."

Again, not improperly, the NIV translators left out that same little conjunction - "de" - "and" or "but".

Now if we put them all back in you will 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.

Let me read it now as I have it on the white sheet:

First the slogan:

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both."

Now to get Paul's response to that slogan let's reinsert the little Greek word "de" as we start the next phrase:

We will translate it "BUT" because clearly this is in contrast to the slogan.

"But the body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

Do you see how Paul's response parallels the slogan?

The slogan said: Food for the stomach and the stomach for food.

Now if you leave out for the moment the negative phrase about immorality) Paul's response reads: "But the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body."

Now looking at verse 14 again and adding that little conjunction "and", we see that just as the slogan, in verse 13 had a third part "and the Lord will destroy them both (or as in the Greek it more specifically says: "And the Lord will destroy the one and the other)

so here in verse 14 in parallel fashion it reads: "And by His power God raised the Lord from the dead and will raise (not destroy) us also."

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.

Neither food nor the stomach have any eternal significance because after all they will both be destroyed in the end anyway.

So while what you eat may have some temporal importance it doesn't have any spiritual significance.

Likewise, the argument would go:

Sexual desire is a natural appetite.

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

And neither has any eternal significance because after all they will both be destroyed in the end anyway.

Hence, what you do sexually with your body has no spiritual significance.

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.

"The body is not meant or made for sexual immorality but 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 I will be forced to fulfill them otherwise.

Just because we have a stomach doesn't mean we can eat anything and everything.

And just because we are capable of having sex doesn't mean we can have any and every kind of sex.

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 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.

When we get to I Corinthians 15 we will see much more about what that body will be like but make no mistake about it - God says it will be that body you now have that he will raise from the dead.

God didn't just create your spiritual nature - he created you, all of you, body and spirit.

He created your body, He redeemed your body, and he will resurrect your body 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 your personality is the temple of the Holy Spirit?

No. Your body, that 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? Our personality only?

No. 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.

God has placed great value on your body.

God highly prizes your body.

God died for your body.

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 has eternal significance.

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

Now in verses 15-18 Paul takes that truth (Your body is for the Lord) and applies it very specifically so we can't miss the point.

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 is as surely his as are his own resurrected legs or arms.

Then in that 15th verse he asks the unthinkable:

Can I 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 context is clear that all sexual immorality is in view here.

Now verse 16:

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".

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

A oneness of flesh was designed by God to mirror a oneness of spirit - Two becoming one in relationship is expressed in the two becoming one physically.

God's intention is that the physical and the spiritual be inseparably linked.

In God's plan for us, the one without the other is inconceivable - except of course in a marriage where the physical union is impossible.

God's intention is that only in spirit-oneness should there be a flesh- oneness.

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 men not sleep with animals?

Why is adultery wrong?

Why are homosexual practices wrong?

Why is pre-marital intercourse wrong?

Simply because there is not true oneness and therefore there should be no one-flesh either. And that is precisely what Paul is arguing here.

The point is not that some Corinthian Christian was sleeping with a prostitute; 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".

He says "he" because in Corinth it was men who tended to have the double standards; and he says "prostitute" because in Corinth that was the particular problem.

But the true problem was that there was intimacy without intention, and there was communion without commitment."

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 the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? NEVER!

Any sexual union outside of that specifically approved by the Lord in a life-long commitment of marriage between a man and a woman is adultery against the Lord.

That's why Paul says at the beginning of verse 18 - "Flee sexual immorality".

Your very physical body is linked to the Lord.

He created that body, died for that body and will raise that body from the grave.

Paul says it is inconceivable that we would take that body away from Christ and join it to another.

And I think the point of verse 18 is that when we do that we dis-integrate our bodies.

To understand verse 18 I think it is best to see the first part as another slogan: (the word "other" is not in the Greek) so the slogan went: "All sins a man commits are outside the body."

This would be very much like what we talked about earlier where the Corinthians saw no relationship between sin and the physical body. Sins, to them, were only spiritual in nature and thus what they did with their bodies didn't matter.

But again Paul responds. You're wrong, "He who sins sexually sins against his own body."

When we join sexually with another person other than a spouse, we pull ourselves, our very bodies away from the Lord.

By the Grace of God, at new birth, we are integrated into Christ.

But when we commit sexual immorality our bodies are dis-integrated, pulled away from the Lord and his purposes for our bodies.

Sexual immorality is a sin against our very body.

If I took the time I could stand here before you and tell you all kinds of emotional stories about the tragedies of broken relationships because of sexual immorality.

I could talk about disease.

I could talk about the violation of human personality in sex without commitment.

I could talk about the sad emptiness of sex without married love.

It might even be possible to frighten some into chastity for a while.

But fear isn't powerful enough to overcome immorality - it takes love.

Do you realize how much God loves you?

God loves you so much he freed you.

He freed you from the tyranny of your own self - your enslaving rights.

He freed you to not sin and instead to follow Him.

God loves you so much he died for your very bodies.

He has called you with your physical body to himself.

Your very body has become part of Christ.

Why not commit sexual immorality?

Because God loves your body and it has been created, redeemed and will be resurrected for Him.

How do you decide what actions are immoral?

It starts with changing the question from "what can I get away with" to "how can I use my body, which is not my own but belongs to Christ, how can I use my body to honor the Lord".

How can I determine what sexual conduct is proper?

Ask the question:

"Will involving a physical member of Christ's body, (for that is what my body is now), in this conduct be using the body in the way God intended?

Will it convey his intentions for human sexuality?