

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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Date: 07 February 2016

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[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians 6, verses 12 through 20. That's page 955 on the Pew Bible. Let me encourage you to turn there if you didn't bring a Bible this morning. 1 Corinthians 6, verses 12 through 20.

Let me read this text for us. 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. 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.

And God raised the Lord, and will also raise us up by his power. 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. 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. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

[1 : 25] Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body. But the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

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, for you were bought with a price.

So glorify God in your body. Let's pray together. Our Father, how right it is to give you praise.

Lord, all creation praises you. From the heavenly host down to the most microscopic plankton in the bottom of the sea.

Lord, all is resounding with your praise. So as we come before your word this morning, Lord, we pray that you would free our minds from distraction and give us clarity by your spirit to listen to what this passage is saying, that we might join in the glorifying work of creation as your image bearers and as those who have been loved and redeemed by Christ.

[2 : 52] We ask this in his name. Amen. Let's talk about sex, baby.

Let's talk about you and me. Let's talk about all the good things and the bad things that can be. Let's talk about sex.

So sang Salt-N-Pepa right here on the New Haven Green just a couple summers ago. 15,000 people. Let's talk about sex. But in the church, it seems like sex has been something we haven't been so apt to talk about.

If you've been watching the farewell season of Downton Abbey, think of the scene a couple weeks ago between the butler, Mr. Carson, and the cook, Mrs. Patmore.

Mr. Carson is about to marry one Mrs. Hughes, and the anxious Mrs. Hughes has sent her good friend, Mrs. Patmore, to Mr. Carson to ask on her behalf if Mr. Carson wants a full marriage with all that that entails.

[4 : 01] And when Mrs. Patmore meets with Mr. Carson and finally beats around the bush long enough for him to catch her drift of what she actually wants to talk about, they both awkwardly turn away from each other in their chairs, speak about the subject in indirect references, and raise their eyes to the ceiling, wonderfully embarrassed.

It's a well-played scene. But despite what many people think, when the Bible speaks about sex, and 1 Corinthians 6 is just one of many places, there is neither the glib casualness of pop music nor the stiff awkwardness of post-Victorian moralism.

You see, in the Christian view of things, sex is neither a mere appetite to fulfill, so long as there are mutually consenting parties, nor is sex a taboo subject that should fill us with embarrassment.

Rather, as we'll see in this passage, the Christian view of sex rooted in the Bible is full of glory. A divine gift of a good creator meant to show forth his kingdom to be used in the way he intends. And so, Paul will stay quite bluntly in verse 18. Flee sexual immorality. God's vision and purpose for sex are so good and glorious that you should run away if you find yourself tempted to pursue anything that falls short of it.

[5 : 45] Like Joseph in Genesis, sprinting away from the advances of Potiphar's wife, flee sexual immorality. But, of course, ours isn't the first period in human history that's experienced more than a bit of confusion surrounding sex.

When you read a text like 1 Corinthians 6, I don't know about you, but it can be strangely comforting to realize that we're not the only ones who've been a bit muddled when it comes to understanding what sex is really for.

In many ways, we still haven't caught up with the first century when it comes to muddledness. And so, there's no reason for the church today to freak out.

The gospel was the power of God for salvation then, and it is still so today. But for all that, it does seem that the church in Corinth was seriously failing to grasp how the gospel ought to shape our view of sex.

Verses 15 and 16 imply that there were Christians in Corinth who thought it was perfectly acceptable to visit the local temple prostitutes and not in order to introduce them to Jesus, mind you.

[7 : 01] But notice this. They were failing to grasp how the gospel shapes our view of sex because at a deeper level, they were failing to grasp what the gospel means for our bodies.

Eight times in nine verses, Paul mentions the body. The whole passage will end, glorify God in your body.

It's that positive vision of God's glory resounding through our bodily life that Paul leaves ringing in our ears. Yes, flee sexual immorality and do so because you've been called to something greater. Glorify God in your body. So what does the gospel have to say about our bodies that will help us think clearly about God glorifying sexual expression and empower us to live that way?

I think we see four things in our text here before us. A four-point sermon this morning, not a three-point sermon.

[8 : 20] Changing things up. Four points in honor of the four quarters of the Super Bowl. Here we go. First, glorify God in your body because your body has a God-given purpose.

We see this in verses 12 through 14. Explicitly at the end of verse 13. The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord. The body has a meaning. Now the passage begins with Paul quoting some slogans that some of the Corinthians would have bandied about.

The first slogan sort of marked off in quotation marks there was, all things are lawful for me. In other words, you can hear the Corinthians thinking, we're not under the law anymore, we're under grace. So that means we have the right to do all things, right? But Paul immediately begins to sort of pick apart and deconstruct their slogan-based moral thinking. All things are lawful for me, you say, but not all things are helpful, are they?

And certainly not all things are liberating. Some things will make you their slave. They will dominate you. The next slogan goes something like this, food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.

[9 : 37] Now in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, there wasn't any punctuation. So we have to actually decide based on the context and the language itself where these slogans kind of begin and end in the text.

And many commentators think that the next line, and God will destroy both one and the other, actually ought to be included in the quotation marks too. And I actually think they're right. And so the Corinthian slogan really runs something like this, food is for the stomach and the stomach for food, and in the end it doesn't really matter because God's going to do away with all this bodily material stuff anyway.

So you see then the underlying idea that they had. What we do with our bodies doesn't really matter. If you're hungry, you should eat.

If you're lustful, you should have sex. It's just a bodily appetite. It doesn't really matter. After all, what God really cares about are our souls and all this bodily stuff is going to go away someday anyhow.

[10:45] And in many ways we can think similarly today, can't we? It's just sex. What's the big deal? Does God really care what I do with my body?

I mean, we love each other. And here's where the gospel comes in. In light of what God has done in Christ, friend, your body is not meaningless.

It's not just a collection of atoms and energy with no purpose and no future. Your body has a meaning. It's actually meant for something.

And not just something, but more specifically someone. Just who exactly? The Lord. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord.

That is the Lord Jesus. And then Paul goes one step further. And the Lord for the body. In other words, your body was created for the Lord to serve him, worship him, love him.

[11:56] And the Lord came for you, body and all. Think about the central message of the Bible. In the beginning, God created humanity, right?

Bodily. And then after the fall had introduced death and decay and disordered desire into the world, when the fullness of time had come, Jesus in the incarnation took on a human body to show that God's redeeming purposes included our whole selves, bodies included.

And in verse 14, Paul goes on and points to the resurrection. Just as God raised the Lord Jesus in the body, he will raise us to body and all. And so despite the Corinthian slogan, God won't simply destroy one and the other.

He will raise them up. So it seems your body, Christian, has a glorious future. From creation to redemption to resurrection, our good God has a purpose for our bodies.

One writer tells the story of a student friend of his who never bothered to buy a screwdriver. Instead, he just kept a couple of knives around, a big one and a small one.

[13:20] The big knife for the big screws, the small knife for the small screws, and they could pretty much get the job done when needed. Sounds like a classic graduate student. Except over time, the knives became bent and dull, losing their usefulness as knives.

And one day when turning a particularly stubborn screw, the knife blade snapped in three pieces, cutting his friend's hand quite badly in the process. Knives are made with a purpose.

There's a right way to use them. In this text, Paul's trying to get us to see what it means to use the human body in the right way for the right purpose.

And that is a purpose that comes from God, the God who made us, who took on flesh to redeem us and will one day raise us in glory. And when we face temptation, and when we need to flee sexual immorality, whether it's the temptation to view pornography on the internet, whether it's the temptation to sleep with your boyfriend or girlfriend, whether it's the temptation to have an affair outside of your marriage, whatever it is, in the moment of temptation, it will do you, friends, much good to speak this very truth to your hearts.

It's not what I'm meant for. These things are not what I'm meant for.

[14:59] I am the Lord's, the Lord is mine, and I have a purpose and a future that makes the fleeting pleasure of this temptation look no more desirable in comparison than lima beans to a third grader.

I hated lima beans as a kid. I actually tried feeding them to my dog under the table. I got in really big trouble for that. But seriously, though, isn't it true that sometimes we give in to sexual sin just because we think we don't deserve better?

We think we're failures, we think we're valueless, purposeless, meaningless, and so we just give in.

Friends, it's not what you're meant for. You are the Lord's, and if you are His, one day in the resurrection, you will radiate with a beauty that if we could see it now in this life, we would be tempted to fall down and to worship you as a God.

The psalm we read earlier, Psalm 16, was all about God not abandoning our souls and even our bodies to the grave, but rescuing them for glory, to be in communion with Him where there is pleasure forevermore.

That's what you're meant for. So glorify God in your body because your body is full of God-given purpose. It's meant for the Lord. And that leads right into our next point.

[16:33] If our bodies are for the Lord and the Lord for our bodies, then that means that we won't just share a future union with Him, but that even now we have a present union with Him as well.

And so the second point, verses 15 through 17, glorify God in your body because your body is a member of Christ. Paul begins with a rhetorical question, do you not know?

This is something they should know. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Now when we hear the word member today, we think of voluntary association in a social group or a political party or a mailing list, what have you?

But when Paul uses the word, the image is much more intimate and much more graphic than that. It literally means a body part. You are the limbs and organs of Christ is how one commentator tries to capture the phrase.

Paul will use this metaphor again in chapter 12 to talk about unity and honor in the church family.

But here, Paul is making a point about sex. Now, in the Corinthian context, the particular issue was sex with temple prostitutes, as we mentioned earlier.

[17 : 54] And of course, there are all sorts of things that are wrong with prostitution. Paul gets that, we get that. But, the point that Paul wants to highlight here is specifically related to the meaning of sex itself.

And that meaning is found in the one little phrase in our passage, one flesh. You see, friends, the biblical view of sex is that it exists for more than mere pleasure on the one hand, and for more than mere procreation on the other.

Ultimately, sex is an expression and declaration and embodiment of a whole life union with another person.

sex is a way of saying to another person, I'm committing my whole life to you, not just physically, but in every way, socially and spiritually, emotionally and financially and so on.

As Paul quotes Genesis to say, the two will become one flesh. flesh. But there's another step in the line of Paul's thinking that we have to see.

[19 : 10] This one flesh, whole life union that sex is meant to signify and communicate is itself meant to be a reflection, a picture of something.

Of what? of the deep, intimate union that Christ has with believers. Verse 17, he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

That is inseparably, personally united. United in such a way that the union between a husband and a wife can only be a reflection.

Paul will say as much again in Ephesians 5. Again, in speaking of marriage and sex, he'll quote Genesis 2, 24. A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

And then Paul says, this mystery is profound and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and the church. In other words, marriage and sex are meant to point beyond themselves to a much greater reality.

[20 : 21] to the unbreakable union between Christ and the church. So you see, this is why the biblical sex ethic is what it is.

In redemption, God unites himself with that which is radically different than himself. Us, fallen and finite human beings.

And that union is forged wholly, intimately, and permanently. And so in the Bible, human marriage is a display and picture of that redeeming love of God.

Marriage is the union between two people who are different, male and female, and who give themselves to one another wholly, intimately, and permanently, as long as they both shall live, the old vows say.

So why is sex with a prostitute so unthinkable in light of the gospel? Why is any sex outside of marriage so out of place in light of the gospel?

[21 : 30] Because only in marriage does sex say what it's supposed to say. That there is a God who loves us, and has given himself wholly for us, and will never, ever forsake us.

If you want to dive deeper into the biblical vision for sex and sexuality and gender, friends, let me encourage you to come to this Sunday school class happening at nine o'clock on Sundays.

Greg and others will be unpacking this over the next few months. But if what Paul is saying about sex here is true, that it's ultimately a sign, a display of the much greater union believers have with Christ, if that's true, then it means something very practical for those of us who are single.

Our culture tells us that it's impossible to be a fulfilled, flourishing human person apart from active sexual expression. In other words, if I'm not having sex, I'm fundamentally missing out.

Missing out not just on having a good time, but on being a whole human person, right? But in light of the gospel, you see the single person who is in Christ, the single person who is in Christ already enjoys what sex is ultimately about.

[23 : 02] God's love. It's like a tourist standing atop the great wall of China with the green hills rolling off in every direction, but staring nose down, face buried in his or her Rick Steve's guidebook, looking at a picture of the thing.

when it stands right there beneath their feet, if they just lift their gaze and take it in. Sex is a glorious picture, yes, but it is still a picture, and you don't need the picture to enjoy the thing itself.

Will you miss out if you're not having sex? No. You don't need sex to be a whole human person, which is to say sex is not God and never can be.

And do you want to know what will help you flee sexual immorality? Grow in your intimacy with the thing itself, with Christ himself.

Why did he give us the scriptures? So that we could hear his words again and again, and like lovers we could relish every word and know his voice and know his presence.

[24 : 29] Why did Jesus give us the Lord's Supper? So that we could touch and taste and hold something bodily that would speak powerfully to our hearts of what he's done for us.

In the Old Testament, sharing a meal was a way to do covenant renewal, to renew the promises and intimacy of a relationship. And here at this meal, the Lord, as it were, renews his covenant with all who've placed their trust in him, who've been joined to him, as verse 17 says, through faith.

So here then, friends, is our second point. Glorify God in your body, because your body is a member of Christ. And the third part follows right from it. again, our intimate union with Christ means that we're not just inseparably connected to him, but in a mysterious way, it means that by the Holy Spirit, God dwells in us.

In verses 18 and 19, then we have the third point. Glorify God in your body, because your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Now, everyone agrees, if you look down, that verse 18 is a tricky verse.

On the surface, Paul seems to be saying that sexual sins are somehow worse than other sins. But you know, the rest of the New Testament proves that that can't be what Paul is saying here.

[25 : 59] Just last week, we saw that sexual immorality and greed and reviling and so on are all equally out of place in God's kingdom. So what is Paul saying?

Well, if you look at the footnote in the ESV there, we could legitimately read the first part of the verse to simply be saying, every sin a person commits is outside the body. And that sounds a lot like some of the Corinthian slogans that Paul was dismantling earlier in the passage.

In other words, what we do in our bodies isn't really that spiritually significant. And many commentators have thought just that, that Paul is quoting and combating here, yet another Corinthian slogan.

But, if that's not the case, if the ESV has rendered the verse properly and many translations do it the same way, if this isn't a Corinthian slogan, then it would seem that Paul is not saying that sexual immorality is worse than other sins, sins.

But he is saying that it has its own sort of seriousness. It has its own particular sort of gravity. Sex is powerful.

[27 : 19] Signifies the whole life union with another person. Signifies the redeeming union of Christ with his church. church. church. And it does all this through a very intimate and vulnerable use of our God-given bodies.

Perhaps this verse is simply Paul being a realist. Sex is a great and powerful gift and precisely for that reason, its misuse can bring great harm.

A fire in a fireplace brings great warmth and joy to a home. But a house on fire brings great sadness and loss.

But in the next verse, Paul turns toward the positive. Again with a rhetorical, do you not know? Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?

Back in chapter 3, Paul called the Corinthians a temple of the Holy Spirit corporately, as a church together, but now he means it very much personally.

[28 : 27] Every individual who believes in Christ receives the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and as the end of verse 19 says, this comes as a gift from God. It's not something we have to earn.

Notice Paul is not saying here in this passage or anywhere in his writings. You must be moral so that the Holy Spirit can dwell in you. He's saying the opposite.

The Holy Spirit already dwells in you by God's grace. Therefore, be who you are. Your body is a temple of God's own spirit now already.

Now live as if that's true. And of course, that means we ought to seek holy lives. But at a deeper level, friends, it means that we ought to live without being haunted by shame.

You see, before you had done one thing right, before you had made any progress in righteousness or holiness, when you were still utterly dead in sin, Christian brother or sister, God took up residence within you by his Holy Spirit.

[29 : 47] He looked at you and said, by virtue of what Christ my son has done, I'm coming to live there permanently. I'm making it my home. And so he will do for everyone who trusts in Christ.

Maybe you're here this morning and you've not been fleeing sexual immorality. Maybe you've fallen into it time and time and time again.

And as a result, shame lingers in every corner of your life. And you feel that if someone really saw you, they wouldn't love you.

And if someone loved you, they couldn't have really seen you. But listen to the good news this morning. No matter how impure and uninhabitable you may feel, if you've placed your trust in Christ, God himself has taken up residence within.

You are a temple of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who when he descended on the Old Testament temple made it so that the priests couldn't even stand up because his presence was so overwhelming and so glorious.

[31 : 12] That's who's in you. That's who you are. Not a mistake. Not a failure. Not an addict. Not a boarded up home on the edge of town where no one wants to live but a temple of the Holy Spirit.

So from now on, come live that way. Come live that way. Be who you are. Come clean where you need to come clean.

There's no shame here. Break off relationships that you need to break off. He'll strengthen you.

He'll be with you. Stop living together.

It'll be worth the cost and the weight. get rid of technology where you need to get rid of technology.

You don't really need a smartphone despite what the world might say.

Don't let guilt and shame and fear hold you in their grip anymore. glorify God in your body.

[32 : 26] Your body has a God-given purpose. It's a member of Christ and it's a temple of the Holy Spirit. But there's one more point that Paul makes.

One more reason to glorify God in our bodies. And this fourth and final reason simply put is the cross. you're not your own.

For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. You see underneath the Corinthian attitude towards sex and the body was the belief that at the end of the day what they did with their bodies was really their own business.

But when we take that attitude and bring it into the light of the gospel we see that it just can't be so. We don't belong to ourselves anymore. We belong to Christ.

You see because of sin friends we lived under a debt that we could never pay. And that debt grew greater every second of every day infinite upon infinite upon infinite.

[33 : 31] A debt that held us wholly under its power body and soul. You might be here this morning living under this debt maybe without even realizing it and you wonder why there's a weight on everything you see and experience and know.

But there is one who came who was able to pay the price to lift the debt and he was not just able but willing to do so.

To redeem us he gave up his own body to die on a cross to pay our debt of sin in our place.

And now in light of what he's done we're gloriously not our own anymore. He bought us for himself and we belong to him.

If you're new to Christianity this is really the point around which everything else turns. Christ crucified. God the fact that we are so sinful that the perfect son of God had to pay an infinite price for us his own blood.

[34 : 48] But the fact that we are so loved and accepted that he gladly paid it out. Becoming a Christian putting your trust in Jesus Christ means embracing these two realities that flow forth from the cross that we are simultaneously sinful and accepted.

And it means entrusting your whole life to him. The great lifter of our debt. The great purchaser of our lives body and soul.

And he becomes the Lord of your life. You listen to what he says in his word. And by the indwelling power of the spirit you're changed more and more to become like him.

And you become a part of his people in the world. The family of God. The church. Of course the thought of being no longer your own as Paul says at the end of verse 19 can sound a bit scary or threatening can't it?

And yet to come under the lordship of Christ even when it comes to how we use our bodies is the most liberating thing there is. If it's true that Jesus Christ is our loving creator and redeemer then surely belonging to him and doing what he says and trusting him is the most liberating and joyful thing we could possibly do.

[36 : 15] Because he gave his body for us we can gladly and safely give our bodies to him. If he was willing to go to the cross for me and love then surely I can trust him with my everything body included.

God's God's purpose. Because it's a member of Christ.

Because it's a temple of the Holy Spirit and ultimately because you were bought with a price because of all that brothers and sisters flee sexual immorality and instead glorify God in your body. flee sexual immorality not because sex itself is awkward or dirty or taboo but because God's vision and purpose not just for sex but for our very bodies is so much more glorious and satisfying.

And as we do so the world will see in us a different way of thinking about our bodies.

[37 : 22] And the world will see in us a different way of living as embodied people in community. And by God's grace it will draw them to know and trust the risen Lord Jesus for themselves.

The one who gave up his body for us so that our bodies might be raised with his. Let's pray. Oh Father we come before you this morning having thought about these words of your Apostle Paul to glorify you in our bodies.

grace. And we want to pause and confess this morning God that that is often so hard. And Jesus we recognize that there is no difficulty, no sin, no temptation, no hardship that you yourself did not know in its full measure and full weight of your grace.

During your earthly ministry. And so we find in you Lord our refuge and our shield and our strength. Fill us anew with your Holy Spirit that we might live out the vision of this passage.

And God build us into a community of love and grace and truth. Make us into a church family where living this kind of life makes sense.

[39 : 16] Where there is fellowship and friendship and communion. Where there is love and acceptance. God I pray for those who are undergoing conviction of sin this morning.

Areas of their life that they need to be fleeing from. Oh God I pray that you'd give them the strength to do just that. Give them the courage to reach out to a Christian friend who can help them in that fleeing.

And help them to grasp the positive vision that you have for them. Whether they be single. Whether they be married. Whether they expect and hope one day to be married.

Whether they expect and realize that they will live a life of singleness all their days. Oh God help them to see the glory of living for you.

Help us to glorify you God in our bodies. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[40 : 29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. so so All right.

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