



Sometimes when we read the Bible we fail to appreciate the way it was first experienced. For example, most of the New Testament books were originally written as letters. When Paul, Peter, John and even Luke wrote their parts of the Bible they wrote them as letters to real people who were part of churches much like ours.

Usually a letter would be brought by hand to the leaders of a church in a particular city. They would then bring it to church and read it out loud. Many of the people would have been unable to read and so the only way for them to experience the letter was if someone read it out loud. And these churches met in homes so there would be only as many people as one home could hold. In any one city there might be several of these gatherings of believers meeting on a Sunday, which meant the letter would circulate from house to house so all the believers in a given city could benefit from it.

Many of these letters addressed particular people in the church. Some of them were praised; others warned or rebuked. Almost always these letters addressed problems and issues that were directly relevant to that particular church. You can imagine at times that could make for a very uncomfortable experience at church, especially if a sensitive issue was raised that was somehow directed at you.

So try to imagine yourself sitting in someone's family room on a Sunday morning with 20-30 other believers. One of the elders says he's going to read a portion of a long letter the apostle Paul had written to them. Here is what he reads.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:15–20).

I hope you felt a bit of the discomfort a believer in the city of Corinth might as he sat in church. I don't think Paul liked to talk about immorality, but he had to. You see, Corinth was a city with

a warped view of sex. Every day hundreds of priestesses from the temple of Aphrodite, which stood atop the city, would come down into the streets and ply their trade. Sex was offered as a way of worship. And this kind of thing had crept into the church. Most of the people in the church at Corinth had come out of a background of immorality. Paul had taught them to flee from it. He taught them God designed sex to be enjoyed within the lifelong covenant of marriage. But after he left they began to rethink all of that and fall back into their old habits.

How relevant these issues are for us. In a recent survey 29% said they've had sex on a first date. Men have had an average of 20 sexual partners in a lifetime while women an average of 6. Eleven million adults said they visit adult-only web sites in a typical week. 65% of teenagers have had sex by the time they finish high school. Almost 4 in 10 babies born in the U.S. are born out of wedlock.

If all of this is true it means most of us have come out of a background of some kind of sexual immorality. Before we go on and see what Paul says about this let me just say something to you: You're a new person in Christ. You're not damaged goods. Paul once said, *"If any man is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come"* (2 Cor. 5:17). If you're in Christ today, you need to see yourself as brand new. It would be easy to take what Paul says here and think you're damaged goods. A lot of Christians walk around in a perpetual state of guilt over their past. I want you to know that you've been forgiven; you've been washed. In Christ you're a new person.

But let's look more closely at what Paul says about this problem. The first thing he does is confront their rationalizations. When we get caught in sin we love to rationalize, don't we? They used some of the very same arguments I hear today.

Two arguments justifying immorality.

1) "Immorality is okay because we're under grace"

Look first at v. 12. *"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."* There should be quotation marks around this phrase, *"all things are lawful for me."* Paul quotes a favorite slogan of the Corinthians: "all things are lawful for me." They figured since as believers we're saved by grace apart from works, and we're freed up from having to keep the law of Moses to be right with God, we can do anything we want. What's scary about

this argument is there's an element of truth in it. Paul himself had taught them we **are** free from the law of Moses. But they'd taken that teaching to an extreme and said since Christ died for our sins and we're forgiven, we can go out and indulge all of our passions and it won't affect our relationship with God.

I hear this kind of thing from time to time today. A church like ours is especially susceptible to this because we emphasize our freedom in Christ so much; we refuse to make rules out of things the Scripture doesn't make rules out of. But we need to be careful that in reacting to legalism we don't go to the other extreme.

Notice how Paul answers this argument that "all things are lawful for me." He doesn't disagree with the statement; he doesn't resort to a new form of legalism and set up all kinds of rules. But he sets up two guidelines to follow in using our freedom in Christ. First, he says "***all things are lawful but not all things are profitable.***" Before we do something we should ask, is this profitable? Is it helpful, not just for us but for others? The moment our freedom is used in a way that it tears others down, then something's wrong. Our freedom was meant to allow us to serve others, not hurt them.

I wonder if the Corinthians thought about the lives of those young ladies that came down into the streets of Corinth when they exercised their Christian freedom? How many men think of the young women on the computer screen as they watch pornography? That's someone's daughter. Immorality tears people down. That's why in the scripture it's always placed side by side with greed and selfishness—the focus is on ourselves. What's often done in the name of love is actually done for self and that twists the very purpose of sex. The first question to ask is, is it profitable?

The second question to ask is, is it enslaving? He says, "***All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.***" As I exercise my freedom in Christ, will I become enslaved to that very thing that I'm doing? Will it end up ruling my life? Will it become an addiction? This is especially important when we talk about things that pertain to the body such as sex, because the body can develop dependencies on things. And when it does, we become a slave to whatever that thing is. Isn't it ironic that in the name of Christian freedom we can actually become slaves of the very things we claim we can do because of our freedom? So, ask, is it enslaving?

2) "Immorality is okay because it's natural"

After dealing with that argument, Paul deals with another one in verses 13–14. "***Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.***" Once again he quotes a favorite slogan

of the Corinthians: "food is for the stomach and stomach is for food." Again put quotation marks around that phrase.

Paul hasn't changed subjects here from sex to eating. This was another excuse the Corinthians used to justify their immorality. They said sex is just like eating: Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food. In the same way, sex is for the body, and the body is for sex. Just as we have a natural and God-given need to satisfy our stomach with food, so it is with sex. When we get hungry and head for the refrigerator, no one hauls us into court and charges us with immorality. Why should it be any different with sex? Why object to something that's perfectly natural and God-given?"

Surely you've heard this one. But here we come face to face with a very important truth. The world, regardless of all the emphasis it places on it, has a very low view of sex. Christians have a higher view of sex than people in the world do. The world sees sex just as another bodily function akin to eating. There's nothing special about it, nothing unique, nothing worth protecting. But as we'll see shortly the biblical view of sex is it touches us and affects us at a much deeper level than eating does. It's something that involves not just our physical body but our soul and our spirit as well. And that's what Paul gets at in his response. He says, "Yes, food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food. I don't disagree with that." But then he says, "***God will destroy them both.***" In other words, although it's true what you say about the stomach and food, all that's just temporary. God will do away with both. But sex involves something altogether different for a couple of reasons. First, while the stomach is made for food the body wasn't made for immorality; it was made for the Lord; it has a higher purpose than just being satiated; it was made to serve the Lord.

Not only that, but while food and the stomach will be done away with, our bodies will be raised up with Christ. Sex involves the body and the body isn't temporary. You might say our bodies weren't made for immorality but rather for immortality. The implication is what we do with our body matters because it will last throughout eternity. When you think what you're going to do with your body, do you consider that?

In the rest of the passage, Paul expands on this idea of how our physical selves (bodies) are connected to our spiritual selves. Notice how many times he uses the word "body" in the passage. He's going to tell us three things that we may have forgotten about our bodies.

Our physical selves are tied to our spiritual selves.

1) Our bodies are members of Christ

Look at v.15. "***Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!***" Notice the sentence begins with the phrase, "***do you not know.***" He asks that

again in v.16 and in v.19. He's saying, "You know this, I've taught you this, but you're not living by this, so let me remind you about it." This is how it is so often. We know better, but we choose not to live by what we know. How many of you didn't know immorality is wrong? Most of us know, but we don't live by what we know. So we need people like Paul to remind us to live by what we know. Do you have someone like that in your life? I guess that's kind of my job but I hope you have someone else as well.

The first thing we need to be reminded of is our bodies are members of Christ. They're intimately connected with Christ, so much so that they're members of his body. And as members of his body we're obligated to serve him and do as he pleases. My hands are part of my body. They do what I tell them to do. I give the orders for my hands. They're connected to me. Why would I take my members and use them, for example, to beat myself up? In the same way, when we engage in immorality we take the members of Christ and use them in a way that damages him. Why do that?

We're warned here about compartmentalizing our lives. We think we can be involved in immorality with our bodies and somehow have it not affect our relationship with God. We think we can isolate this one area of our lives, our sexuality, from our relationship with Christ. We pray, we go to church, we read the Bible, we do all those things, but in this one area of our lives, we think we can do what we want; it won't infringe on our relationship with God. But that's impossible because our bodies are members of Christ.

2) Our bodies are one spirit with the Lord

Part of the reason we can't do that is found in verses 16–17. *"Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, 'THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him."* This is the second thing we need to be reminded of, what actually happens when we engage in sex with someone—we become one body with that person. That's why he goes all the way back to Genesis 3 and quotes, *"The two shall become one flesh."* He goes back to the first marriage where Adam and Eve are encouraged to enjoy one another and to multiply and to be fruitful. The Bible says "His commandments are not burdensome." I say "Amen" to that! But the whole purpose for this is the two would become one flesh.

This gives us great insight into the nature and purpose of sex. Sex is an act that unites two people in a one-flesh relationship. The idea here is a permanent bond is created. This word "joins" in v.16 literally was used in Greek to refer to glue. When two people come together that way they're glued together. It's like Crazy Glue. If you apply that glue properly, the bond that's created is actually stronger and harder to break than the thing itself.

If you try to break that bond you can't do so without doing great damage to whatever it is you're gluing together.

Paul is saying the sexual union is like that. It unites us, not just in body, but in soul as well. Sex, whether we realize it or not, acts like glue in a relationship. C.S. Lewis once said: "Each time a man and a woman enter into a sexual relationship, a spiritual bond is established between them that must be eternally enjoyed or eternally endured." We talk about safe sex, but you can't put a condom on your heart.

Sex is far more than just a physical act. It's an act that involves the whole person—body and soul. There is no such thing as casual sex. Don't ever buy that lie. Something mysterious and deep takes place in this union. This is why the word of God absolutely insists that sex be practiced within the covenant of marriage. Sex is a life-uniting act and to do it justice it has to be experienced in the context of a lifelong union, and that always means marriage. Within that context sex is a beautiful expression of intimacy and vulnerability that should be celebrated. All the masks are taken off and there's no fear of rejection, no fear of abandonment, no fear of "will he call me tomorrow or not?"

Though it might be enjoyed on a certain level, the end result of immorality is a sense of hollowness, frustration, and aloneness. And for those who are believers it even has a greater impact. Look at v.17. *"But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him."* Just as two people joined in sex are one flesh, so those who come into a relationship with the Lord are joined with him. Our spirit has been glued with the Lord's spirit. So, again, when you engage in immorality, you're actually implicating the Lord Jesus in the same act. You're united with him. You're one spirit with him. You can't separate your spirit from your body, and so you are involving the Lord himself in this act.

3) Our bodies are the dwelling place of God

The third thing we need to be reminded of is in verses 18–20. *"Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."*

Notice that sexual sin is unique. Don't let anybody ever tell you sexual sin is like any other sin. That's a lie. It's true God is willing to forgive all sin alike, but sexual sin is different from other sins in that it constitutes a sin against the body. What does that mean? Other sins that involve the body—chemical addiction, gluttony—will both eventually destroy the body. Why is immorality unique in this regard? The key is our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and immorality violates the Spirit's presence in the body in a way that these other things don't. God himself lives in us. What's the temple of the Lord for? It's for worship. I like

what John McArthur says about this verse: "Could you imagine committing sexual immorality in this church sanctuary?" No way. But that's no worse than what happens every time a believer is involved in immorality because our bodies are the sanctuary of God. God dwells there.

We should flee from immorality and glorify God.

1) We should flee immorality

So what do we do with all of this? There are two commands in this passage. The first comes at the very beginning of v.18: "***Flee immorality.***" He doesn't say stop immorality. He uses much stronger words—flee from it, run from it. I like what Wayne Wright says: "The best companion against immorality is geography." In other words, get as far away as possible. Our sexual urges are so great and so powerful that we can't afford to hang in there and duke it out with temptation because if we do, we're going to lose. Sooner or later you're going to lose that battle if you don't flee from it, if you don't run as far away as you can. Essentially, we must get out of the situation, whatever it is, that might lead us into immorality.

My wife and I talk to engaged couples all the time about this. We tell those who come to us for premarital counseling we expect them to be pure before marriage, and if they aren't being pure they have to start being pure or I won't marry them. That includes not living together, not sleeping together, and not fooling around. We've had a lot of couples try to talk us into being okay with them living together. They usually try to convince us they need to because of financial concerns and they'll just sleep in separate bedrooms before the wedding. Yeah right! How different that is from what Paul says here. He says, "Don't see how close you can get to the fire and not get burned. Run as far away as possible!"

One of the ways we can flee immorality is to be very careful with the kind of things that we allow ourselves to be exposed to. If we're feeding the flesh in the kind of books we read, the kind of movies we watch, the kind of web sites we visit, then we're just setting ourselves up for failure in this area. To flee immorality means we stay away or at least set up some form of accountability.

2) We should glorify God with our bodies

But there is a second command. The first is negative, but this second is positive. In v.20 he says, "***For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.***" Everything Paul has said up until now has been leading up to this. Why should we glorify God in our bodies? Because your body has been purchased by God with the precious blood of his Son. If you pay a lot of money for a beautiful book, you won't tear the pages out to make a shopping list. If you pay a lot for a nice car, you won't spray paint silly patterns on the hood. In the same way, you who've been bought at tremendous cost have to remember not to throw your bodies in the mud of immorality, but rather to glorify God with it. Your body is under new management. Use it in a way that honors the one who owns it.

Conclusion

Have you ever known someone who didn't bother to buy a screwdriver? Instead of a screwdriver, they use a knife. And for some things a knife works just fine, but the problem is it's not good for the knives. The ends get bent and they get harder and harder to use for their intended purpose. Not only that, if you're not careful and use it on a very stubborn screw the knife blade can snap and you might even cut your hand and have a bloody mess to clean up.

You see, that's what happens when we use something for the wrong purpose. That's what this whole passage is about. It's about using your body in the right way. Your body was made for the Lord. It will be raised up into immortality. It's a member of the body of Christ. It's the temple of the living God. It's been bought with a very steep and precious price. Now use it for what it was made for.

If you're presently involved in an immoral relationship, or if you're playing around with pornography, deal with it today. If you need help, get it. Start by confessing to someone; ask them to pray for you; ask them to hold you accountable. Stop rationalizing. You know it's wrong. If you're a believer, you know you're tearing yourself apart. You're defiling the temple of God! You're not paralyzed. You can change. It's going to be painful, but it's going to be a lot more painful eventually to continue on. Do as Paul said: Flee immorality and glorify God in your body.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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