

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Introduction

The Christians at Corinth had just started on the Christian road. They had so much to unlearn – habits and outlooks that had formed over many years. They had no background of Christian teaching; it was all new to them. Their families and old friends had not changed; society had not changed. They themselves were still in their old bodies, with all its appetites and urges. So there was great need for after-care pastoral support and further teaching.

Paul starts with the Christian use of the body – how to think of it and treat it. He does so in a very down-to-earth way. This may seem an unusual topic. We are strong on soul and spirit, but what has the body to do with being a Christian? The body is very important. The Lord Jesus took a body at the incarnation, His body was raised up on the third day, He rose to heaven in the body, and He will return in the body. Our bodies are His now. At death, our bodies will be buried or disintegrate. But at the second coming we will have new bodies. We will spend eternity in a body.

Our bodies, like our souls, are affected by Salvation. We are warned about misusing our bodies, and then reminded of God's claims on our body. Then we are told of the proper use of the body.

Warning about the misuse of the body

Paul has to straighten out their thinking, and answer their false reasoning. **“Everything is permissible for me”** (1 Corinthians 6:12) The NIV uses inverted commas, it is probable that Paul is quoting the phrase, a saying of some of his readers, claiming they are free as Christians. Paul agrees there is a sense in which we are free, but we have to be careful here. Not everything is beneficial or helpful, and we must not be enslaved by anything. We are not free to do what we like with our bodies.

There are lots of things we can do in theory, but they do not help us or other people who are watching our lives and taking their cue from us. Be especially careful not to be enslaved by anything. There is nothing more enslaving than sex. It can be a good servant, or a terrible master. It can have profound effects if not controlled.

Then he turns to another specific argument to justify sexual misconduct. Some argue that just as eating food is a natural function, sex is a natural function. So if it is OK to enjoy the one whenever you like, it is OK to enjoy the other whenever you like. Paul points out these two are not the same. The sexual function is far more profound and far-reaching in effects.

The body is important to God. It is going to be raised up from the dead one day. It belongs to God. We cannot use it immorally. Cannot unite with a prostitute (licensed prostitution was the norm in Corinth). The Greek word κολλωμενος (1 Corinthians 6:16,17) – “glued” – the same word used for being united with a prostitute as is used

to describe our relationship with the Lord – the Christian should be “glued” to his Lord.

Sexual immorality is sinning against our own body, grossly misusing it, and desecrating a precious gift. Eating food does not affect the body in this profound way, nor do other sins profoundly affect the body. But sex blasts the body, and profoundly affects the whole personality. So we must “flee” from it - φευγετε - make it your habit to run away as far and as hard as you can from it. Do not argue, ponder, delay, or stay to debate – or else you will certainly succumb.

Finally Paul gives the profoundest reason for being pure. **Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?** (1 Corinthians 6:19). You are indwelt by the third person of the Godhead. Just as the local church is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16), so the individual’s body is the temple place of the indwelling of the Spirit. We cannot make *unholy* the temple of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it must be holy, set apart for the use of the one who lives within you. C.f. Joseph under temptation to sin with Potiphar’s wife, “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God” (Genesis 39:9).

The Holy Spirit dwells within each one. This not only shows that He is divine because He must be everywhere, but it also teaches us what a dignity that gives to our lives and personalities. How careful we should be to protect our bodies and ensure our faculties are not misused for sinful purposes.

This principal has practical bearing when we ask ourselves such thing as should I have the operation, go to the dentist, take a day off, go on holiday, take risks, take up this or that habit, neglect or indulge? Remember the importance of the body – God the Father made it, God’s Son purchased it, and God’s Holy Spirit indwells it. We need a God-centred attitude to our bodies. It is not enough to look after them so that we feel fitter and enjoy life more. But our bodies are the Lord’s – and it is our duty to look after someone else’s property.

Our body and our instincts must not master us, but with the aid of the indwelling Holy Spirit we are to master it. Not to satisfy lust, but to honour God.

The Lord’s claim upon our bodies

We are already indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He now makes more explicit the Lord’s claim on us by saying **You are not your own; you were bought at a price** (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). You do not belong to yourself. You have no right to treat your body as you think you will. You cannot take another person’s property and use it as you want.

Straight to the Cross of Calvary. Reminder of several meanings of the Cross – not only forgiveness of sin but also His death was the price He paid for us to belong to Him. Very heavy price – the death of the spotless Son of God. He gave His body to take possession of your body, and everything to do with it – limbs, eyes, ears, organs, tongue, faculties, possessions, hands. He purchased your redemption and He purchased you. We may talk about our rights – our right to this and that, in home,

business, church, relationships etc – but the fact is that if we understand the Cross aright, we have no rights.

This is at the root of discipleship. Many are frustrated and making little progress because they have forgotten the basic fundamental, that they are His. Alas, we do not always possess what we purchase (e.g. we lend books and never get them back). We do not make any more spiritual progress till we remember whose we are. The running of your life and making decisions and use of your body is not a joint enterprise between you and the Lord. He has total monopoly. He owns all the shares and all the voting rights. You do not belong to men, church, family, self – but to Christ.

So often we feel it is not safe to trust the Lord. We let Him take control, but we always want to keep our foot on the brakes. Someone once said, “He who is his own master has fool and tyrant to be his lord. Self is a cruel slave driver and terrible oppressor.” If only we believed He loved us better than we love ourselves. If only we trusted ourselves less and the Lord more. Do not rob the Lord of what is rightly His.

The proper use of the body

Therefore honour God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:20). We must put ourselves at the Lord’s disposal every day of our lives. Do not think of our rights but instead, think of our debts. Use our body to bring glory to Him. **So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God** (1 Corinthians 10:31). Bishop Taylor Smith said, “Lord, this bed is your altar. This body is the sacrifice. I am yours for another day.” Ask God to take this body, mind, imagination, will, affections, possessions, and show you how to use them according to His will and for His purpose.

You are not here for your honour, to satisfy yourself and increase your wealth and position. You must glorify God by honest hard work, keeping pure, acting honourably and speaking truth, looking after your body and health, not taking unnecessary risks, not neglecting or over-indulging. Allow the Lord to express Himself, to speak to others and care for others through you. Not self-expression, but Christ-expression.

How important it is to glorify Him and be His when tempted. These eyes can be the gateway to evil when they stray in the wrong direction. What damage this tongue can do if self takes over and not the Lord. Our hands are his also. There were once three gamblers sitting together in a railway compartment. They got their cards and money out to play, but they needed a fourth player. A gentleman sitting in the corner of the compartment was invited to join the game. He replied, “I cannot – I have no hands – they belong to someone else.”

Conclusion

How do we see our Christian lives? Are we doing our best to be decent Christians? Not taking things too far, but hoping we will pass? Or are we remembering that we are not our own, but His? It is a tragedy when self gets in the way – we are proud of our possessions, full of our own importance, and determined that others should know it. So there is this hindrance, and our lives are spoiled. We wonder why we are dissatisfied and miserable and guilty.

Rather, we should be the Lord's, totally His, and at His disposal. We may be afraid of many things, but prepared to trust. Do you want to be fully possessed by your purchaser? Give Him what is His? You have Christ. Does He have you? You possess Him. Does He possess you? What blessing could be poured into life if only we gave self over to Him. He would fill us and take possession of us by His Holy Spirit. Then what rejoicing, what peace, and what usefulness it would bring to our lives.

*“My glorious victor, prince divine,
Clasp these surrendered hands in Thine.
At length my will is all Thine own,
Glad vessel of a Saviour's throne.”*

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1).