

God's Wisdom in an Age of Confusion
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
My Body, Christ's Body

Introduction

It's all going to burn up in the end? My body my choice? Love is Love?

Our culture continues to be concerned about the human body... So, what is the body for, exactly?

The mantras we hear in our culture tell us things about our body and what the body is for. In Christian circles we hear that "it's all going to burn up in the end" (based on a poor reading from 2 Peter). Another cultural cliché we hear these days is "my body, my choice" (abortion rights), and "Love is Love" (who I get to love regardless of gender). Great confusion over the body.

As we will see today, the Corinthians too lived in a culture that had confusion over the body and what it's for. Today, we will get clear instruction from Paul about what the body is for, and how that relates to our ethics, that is how we live our lives, particularly express our sexuality. Paul is going to give us what I call "deep ethics" – meaning, that our relationship with Christ determines everything, including morality.

Today, my hope is to remind you who you are in Christ and what you have received. And if you are not in Christ, what is being offered to you...

Let's pray...

Background to Corinth: Review

Last week we explored the kinds of behaviors that characterize Corinth (and our day!) and how Paul reframes their identity. In other words, they are in danger of forgetting who they are...

In other words, IDENTITY INFORMS BEHAVIOR. As followers of Jesus, we are *people who have been given new desires for a new destiny: fellowship with Christ!*

Exposition of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Paul opens with what is most likely a cultural cliché repeated around Corinth.

Cultural Cliché in Corinth?

1 Cor. 6:12a

Does that sound familiar to you? It's almost an exact echo of what we hear in our own day, isn't it?

But listen to how Paul responds:

Body of believers should not be "ruled" by its desires

1 Cor. 6:12b

Note that, Paul says, "I will not be mastered or ruled by anything in regard to my body – desires, urges, what have you."

The body is for the Lord Jesus

1 Cor. 6:13a

Here we likely have another cliché. In essence, what is being said here is that the body is temporal, not eternal, and therefore just as the body is for food, so it's also for pleasure, and since it's not eternal, then nothing I can do here would hurt it eternally.

Now, this verse has always confused me. It almost sounds like God is on a war-path and destroying everything. That is not quite correct. Instead, Paul is again quoting a euphemism from Corinth. However, Paul has a different perspective here:

The body is for the Lord Jesus

1 Cor. 6:13b-14

Corinthians

Paul

“I have the right to do anything”

“*but* not everything is beneficial”

“I have the right to do anything

“*but* I will not be mastered...”

“Food is for the stomach and
the stomach for food, and God will
put an end to both”

“but the body is for the Lord...”

So, what does it mean that the body is not for porneia (where we get the word porn or pornography from). While this word is generally used as a catchall word for any form of sexual expression that falls outside of God’s appointed means in the NT – and I shared last week that God’s appointed means for sexuality is a covenant union between one man and one woman that we today call marriage – here it is in reference to a prostitute. Prostitution in the ancient world is different than how we normally think about it.

Prostitution in ancient Greece

The Greek geographer Strabo, who wrote his works in the early 1st century AD, claimed the temple employed around a thousand hierodouloi. These were temple slaves, who served as sacred prostitutes dedicated to the goddess of love, Aphrodite. The women, given by both men and women to the temple, would engage in sexual rituals with visitors as a form of religious devotion. This comes in direct contrast with today’s definition of prostitution. This is why their services brought great wealth to the city of Corinth and was something of which the city was proud rather than ashamed. The reputation of Corinth as a center of sacred prostitution was so widespread in the ancient Greek world that the Greek phrase “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth” became a popular saying. The saying implied that not everyone could afford the expensive services of the temple prostitutes, as it was not the most affordable thing one could partake in in ancient Corinth.

Last week I shared how marriage is God’s idea and it is God’s gift given to human beings as a way for human flourishing, both in bringing forth children into the world and stabilizing society. Now, next week, we will discuss marriage and singleness in more detail, as Paul has much to say on these topics.

But for now, let’s look more carefully at these monumental statements Paul makes here. He has just said that the body is for the Lord – and who is the Lord? Most of the time, it’s Jesus. And here I will show you that that’s indeed who it is. Look with me:

One-Flesh with Jesus?

1 Cor. 6:15-17

Your body is a member of Christ – it belongs to Him and is joined to Him. So, shall it be joined to a prostitute? Paul asks. Let’s pause for a moment and ask what he is referring to.

So, why is sexual immorality so damaging then? Well, Paul tells us...

First, Paul quotes from Genesis where the two first human parents, Adam and Eve, are joined together in what the writer calls “one-flesh”.

Second, this same Greek word shows up in the OT (Septuagint) at some critical places, namely in Deuteronomy, concerning Israel’s relationship to God.

Deut. 4:4; 10:30; 13:4

Okay, lets just step back for a moment and consider this: Paul is comparing our union with the Lord Jesus as a bodily joining together that is parallel to marriage. Now, think about this biblically/theologically. Paul is not using marriage as an illustration, saying your union with Christ is like marriage – he is saying, marriage is like union with Christ. Union with Christ is the basic reality of what God intends our lives to be in His presence – marriage is an earthly, imperfect and temporal (not eternal) metaphor for a deeper, truer spiritual reality here.

Again, marriage is the shadow – union with Christ is the substance. Think about that, friends!

Now, having set the foundation for what the body is for (Christ), he gets practical:

Flee Immorality!

1 Cor. 6:18

This is why the consequences for sexual sin are so significant – its sinning against something that God made for Himself. More so, listen to this:

The Body as Christ's Temple

1 Cor. 6:19

The body is not only a temple where the Spirit resides. Again, we need to do some reflection here:

The Temple in the OT was the place where God's presence resides. Now, Paul says, your body is that very temple where the Spirit resides. Now, we are also the body of Christ collectively – but I don't want that to take away from the force of what Paul is saying here.

Having laid out this whole foundation for us, he now gives the directive – which is really quite simple:

The purpose of the body "in Christ": To Bring God Glory

1 Cor. 6:20

Paul concludes by stating that our bodies are bought with a price (Christ's blood), and that we are to glorify God with our bodies since they ultimately belong to Him.

Main Idea:

Through Christ and the Spirit, human bodies have become redeemed "houses" for His glory, destined for future resurrection. Therefore, believers are called to glorify God with their bodies.

Application: How do I glorify God with my body?