

WHAT ARE BODIES FOR?

by Ray C. Stedman

Corinth was a city given over to the worship of sex. A thousand priestesses from the temple of Aphrodite that stood on the little hill behind the ancient city would come down into the streets at night and ply their trade. Sexual promiscuity, therefore, was accepted and highly regarded in that culture, as it is pretty much the same today here in California.

When the Apostle Paul had come into the city, and had begun to teach and preach about Jesus, a church had started there, and he had taught it what it ought to know about life, truth, and reality. As a consequence of that teaching, the Christian church in Corinth began to challenge head-on this whole sexual looseness of the city.

Paul had said what was going on in the city was wrong, but there were some in the church there who took issue with him on that. Some said that he himself had taught truth that laid the groundwork for viewing some of the sexual practices of Corinth as being right and proper for Christians.

There is nothing more relevant, more up-to-date, more up-to-the-moment than the Word of God, for this is exactly what is happening among us today. In the Christian churches, there are many voices being raised saying that we need to soften our view toward sexual immorality and certain sexual practices and allow them to be manifested even by Christians.

This was exactly the problem that Paul is confronting here at Corinth. Some of the people there, challenging what he taught in this area, were actually quoting him in support of what they believed.

Paul, beginning with Verse 12 of Chapter 6, begins with those quotations that they were referring to him:

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved 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 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. {1 Cor 6:12-14 RSV}

Notice in that paragraph the quotation marks that are in the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, and perhaps some of the other modern versions around the words "all things are lawful for me." This is the editors' way of showing that they felt this was something these people had written to Paul about and were saying constantly within the church. And it is very likely that Paul had said something like this, because this was part of his teaching about the grace of God: "All things are lawful for us."

The difference between legalism and true Christianity is right at that point.

The legalist looks at life and he says, "Everything is wrong unless you can prove from a verse of Scripture that it is right." That is legalism. It is a negative approach to life; it clamps a prohibitive hand upon everything that is fun and says it is all either illegal, immoral or fattening.

But New Testament Christianity comes at it differently. It says everything is right: God made the earth and everything in it and everything is right except what the Word of God labels is wrong. That is an entirely different point of view, opening the whole world to exploration and discovery and enjoyment, except for a very limited part that Scripture clearly labels wrong.

Now this is what these people were doing -- they were quoting Paul in this regard. They were saying, "Paul himself said 'All things are lawful for me.'" And so Paul begins to answer that now with this paragraph recognizing their quotations.

Notice how he answers it. Their argument sounded very familiar, and it should sound very familiar to us today. They were saying that sexual freedom, i.e., sex outside of marriage, is theologically sound. Their argument probably went something like this: "The Law of Moses is what tells us that it is wrong to commit adultery." ("Adultery" there is a broad word referring to any kind of sexual wrongness.) They would say, "The Law of Moses says, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' but Paul taught us that when Christ came into our life the Law ended its reign. We are no longer under the Law, we are no longer under this commandment not to commit adultery, therefore, by Paul's own words, we are free to indulge in some of these sexual practices here that are so widely accepted in Corinth."

You can recognize how up-to-date that philosophy is today. Now notice how Paul answers this:

First, notice what he does not do. He does not come in and say, "Now that you are a Christian we have a new rule here for you. You must not do such and such, and such and such." Paul never does that; he never retreats into legalism. What he does is say, "Yes, you are right, but you need to understand that truth must always be balanced." And in this section he sets forth the balancing of truth.

Balancing truth is like walking along the top of a fence. When I was a boy I used to enjoy walking along the back fences in the city of Denver. I could go for blocks on the back alleys just walking on them. I enjoyed doing it, but it was a very narrow path. And Jesus said that was what the Christian life would be like. He called it "the straight and narrow way," {cf, Matt 7:14}. The problem is to keep from falling off, and the interesting thing about that is you can fall off on either side. It does not make any difference -- either side is equally dangerous, it is the same distance down. Therefore, Christians ought to constantly remember that the pathway of liberty is always narrow. It is a wonderful path; it is a freeing and exhilarating walk, but it is not very wide, and you can easily fall off into one error or the other.

I remind you again of C. S. Lewis' great admonition to us that Satan always sends error into the world in pairs which are opposites. His great hope is that you will get so upset about one of these errors that you will fall off the fence into the other one and then he has got you.

Liberty is liberty only, the apostle insists, when it is balanced between two extremes. These people in Corinth were saying, "The Law is an extreme; it makes a rigid demand on my life that I and nobody else can live up to." And that is true -- the Law is an extreme. When you begin to understand the impact and import of the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, you find that they are so easily and quickly broken there is not an individual in the world that has ever lived up to them except the Lord Jesus himself. The Law is an extreme, Paul says, "You are right, but license is an extreme too." Feeling that the reaction to being under the Law is to be free from all law and doing whatever you like, that too, Paul says, is an extreme, and you have lost your liberty when you fall into it. "All things are lawful," he quotes, "but they are not helpful." The moment your liberty begins to hurt you or to hurt someone else, you have fallen off into license, and you are in the same kettle of fish that you were on the other side.

"Further," Paul says, "the things that are not helpful are always enslaving. I will not be brought under the power of anything." Notice how he is balancing truth so beautifully here. The things that hurt you always have a tendency to be habit forming. Have you noticed that? You tend to keep on doing them. They hurt you because they are fun. They give you a certain degree of pleasure, and that is why you do not mind the hurt so much, but that degree of pleasure is habit-forming, either physically or emotionally or in whatever way.

A man said to me one day, "It's easy to quit smoking; I've done it hundreds of times."

This indicates how easily you fall into patterns of habit. Isn't it amazing how true this is? The things that are not helpful are always habit-forming, and that creates a slavery of its own. It means the end of liberty, and so the apostle says, "I am interested in true liberty. You must remember, therefore, that truth can be lost on either side of the fence."

They had another argument there in Corinth which sounded impressive and which they had also written to Paul about. They made another quotation (this will sound familiar too): "Food is meant for the stomach and the

stomach for food." Notice the quotation marks around that -- that is what they were saying to Paul. In other words, the stomach was designed for food; food supplies the need and is obviously designed for the stomach, therefore, it is natural and right to satisfy your need whenever it arises. We all run to the refrigerator when we get hungry. Nobody raises any objections; nobody hauls us into court or charges us with immorality when we do that; we are satisfying a natural need of the body. How many times have you heard the argument today that sex is like that? Sex organs were made for sex, therefore, it is natural and right to satisfy them, and, "When you feel the urge, it is OK to merge!" That is what they say, isn't it?

Now the apostle's answer to that is a profound revelation of the difference between our food appetites and our sexual appetites. Here we enter into an area of revelation where it is clearly evident that the Word of God sees far more profoundly, far more deeply, into the nature of our humanity than anything the world around us sees. Here, by contrast, you will see the shallowness of the world's view of sex.

Paul's answer is put in brief words: "True," he says, "food is made for the stomach and the stomach is made for food, but God will destroy both one and the other." In other words, that is only a temporary arrangement. It is true that the stomach and food were made for one another -- and God obviously did that -- but he only did it for a temporary purpose. It is only for this life that that is true, and there is coming a day when God is going to destroy both the food and the stomach. In other words, God has no permanent plan for the belly, but he does have a permanent plan for the body. That is the point Paul makes.

The body, apart from its digestive apparatus, has a reason and purpose in God's program, therefore, digestion is temporary. But sexuality is much more profound and touches us at a much deeper level. Sexuality, according to the Scriptures, pervades our whole humanity. It touches us not only in terms of the body, physical, but in terms of the soul, the psyche, and our social relationships with one another. Even more profoundly, sex is something that characterizes and touches us at the level of the spirit as well.

Did you ever realize that the Bible teaches that worship is a form of sexual expression? If the basic definition of sex is the urge to merge -- you can see that going on in terms of friendship, can't you? You sit down with a friend and you want to share, you say; you want to hear what they have been doing; you want to tell them what you have been doing. You want to hear what their opinions are about certain things, and you want them to listen to yours. Friendship consists of the interchange of one life with another at the level of the soul in its expression of mind, emotion and will. Now, what is worship? Worship is a hunger to be possessed by God and to possess all there is of God. The worshipping spirit cries out and says, "Oh Lord, come, be with me, take me, use me, possess me." God, in turn, gives us the beautiful promise that he makes himself available to us to be owned and used by us and to relate to us. Jesus put it in the most precise way when he said that the deepest relationship possible between a human being and his God is: "You in me and I in you," {John 14:20b RSV}. That is what Paul is talking about.

We are taught by the world that sex is that which only touches us at the physical level. In the modern movements of today that call themselves "Sexual Freedom Movements," "Feminist Movements," "Woman's Rights" and other things, we are getting the philosophy handed to us that sexual differences between male and female are basically shallow, superficial, external differences. At heart, they say, we are human beings. But the Word of God never tells us that. In the Scripture, from the very moment that man appears on the scene until the end, as far as we are carried into the reaches of eternity, man appears as two sexes: "Male and female created he them," {Gen 1:27 KJV}. That division between our sexuality is pervasive; it runs all through our whole being. We are not only different, male and female, in our physical bodies, but we are different in the way we approach each other in our attitudes, our emotions, our reactions.

We are different in the way we worship God, and the way we enjoy him, and respond in worship as well. God likes it that way and God made it that way, therefore, sex is a far deeper and more significant appetite than food and drink. This is what the apostle is seeking to say to these Corinthians.

He points out that God has a purpose for the body beyond this present life. He says, "The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Notice the parallel there. They were saying, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food." They are obviously designed to be together, and that is right." And they were right about that. Paul says, "All right, now carry it further: the counterpart to the

human body is not sex expression; it is the possession of the Lord himself -- that is what your bodies were made for. There is a dignity about humanity that is far greater than any animal can claim. Humanity is made to be indwelt by God." That is the most exciting, the most remarkable, the most revolutionary teaching in the Word of God: We were made to be indwelt by God himself!

The body was made for the Lord and the Lord for the body. This is incredible truth, when you begin to understand what Paul is really saying here. Therefore, you cannot compare it to any kind of relationship between the stomach and food. And, as Paul brings out, God has a purpose for the body: He is going to raise it up. He raised up the body of the Lord; he will raise us up also. Sexuality that penetrates our whole being will not be expressed on the physical level in the resurrected body, but it will have its expression on the soulish and the spiritual levels. God has a purpose for it in the life to come. That is why we are given physical sex. It is designed to teach us what we are like, who we are, what our role is.

Our male organs are external in order to emphasize to us, in that marvelous visual aid that God is always employing, that the male role is one of external leadership designed to take the initiative, and yet to do so with tenderness and gentleness. Any physical sex within marriage that is conducted without that double role of initiation with tenderness becomes destructive and creates difficulties within the marriage.

Female organs are internal, hidden to correspond to the role of women of being inwardly sensitive far deeper emotionally than men, more subjective, contributing deeper insights than man ever does, having a greater sense of compassion, being responsive, and responding to that which precedes and leads. All this is designed to teach us truth about our relationship with one another, and with God himself. That is why, throughout the Scriptures, God appears in relationship to the Christians as the lover, the aggressor, the male. They, we, are the bride, the responders, the followers, and that role is consistent all through the Scriptures, Old and New Testament alike. Paul is thus underscoring here in these brief words the tremendous mystery of sex, what it is designed to instruct us in and how it is the very secret of life itself. To misuse it is to miss all the beauty of it. Its beauty is destroyed and defiled when it is indulged for self-satisfaction only, or without the full commitment that marriage represents. (Paul is going to have a lot more to say about this when he gets into Chapter 7. He is going to take up, in detail, the mutual sex roles of husband and wife, and we are going to look at them with the same frankness that the Scripture does.)

But now, at this point, Paul in his wonderful, practical way moves on to attack the problem of prostitution that was present there in Corinth. This, again, is the glory of the Scriptures. They are never merely academic. They never present a principle without bringing it tight down to where the rubber meets the road, and applying it to life itself.

That is what Paul does here with this widespread problem of religious temple prostitution going on in Corinth, Verse 15:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one [flesh]." But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. {1 Cor 6:15-17 RSV}

In this passage Paul describes fornication as a horrible sin which involves taking a body, which is the personal property of Jesus himself, and using it in a relationship with a godless woman and actually paying her to allow this to be done to her. Paul says that is equivalent to making Christ himself commit prostitution -- involving the Lord of Glory in a dissolute and a reprehensible act. That is what every act of prostitution and every act of fornication is.

Dr. J. A. Schep, in the book *The Nature of the Resurrection Body* says,

Sexual intercourse always effects a complete union of the two persons involved, and thus is quite different from eating or drinking something. Becoming one flesh with a harlot means becoming one body with her, i.e., being united with her in every respect, in her shameful sinning as well.

This is the thing that raises Paul's expression of horror here: "Never! Who would want to do a thing like that?"

But in contrast, the Christian's union with his Lord is much deeper than even sexual union. Notice that Paul goes clear back to Genesis here. He takes that governing word spoken to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, "The two shall become one flesh" (which applied to marriage) {cf, Gen 2:24}, and he applies that here to a passing liaison with a common street prostitute. What he says is that something goes on in the act of sex that creates a union far deeper than the merely passing pleasure of the moment. It is part of that whole mystery that God designed, and set forth at the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Thus it has tremendous impact upon those who give themselves to this.

This is a profound insight that we need to take very seriously these days. The Apostle Paul is telling us here that something happens when you indulge in sexual relationships that is far deeper than your feelings will ever recognize. I have had men who live sexually promiscuous lives tell me that they never enter into even the most casual and passing liaison in this way but when they meet the girl afterward there is a change; there is a deep sense of having shared a mystery together. They cannot help but feel there has been an intimacy that can never be forgotten that has stamped them to some degree. This is what the apostle is saying here is true, so we are dealing with very deep and powerful forces.

But now, in contrast, the Christian's relationship with his Lord is one of spiritual identity. These are probably among the most revolutionary words ever written in the Word of God or anywhere in the whole world of books. Paul says,

The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.
{1 Cor 6:13 RSV}

And then in Verse 17,

... he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. {1 Cor 6:17 RSV}

The Lord is a Spirit, and we are human spirits, and when regeneration occurs there is a fusing of identity. This is what Peter refers to in his letter as having "become partakers of the divine nature," {2 Pet 1:4}. Think about that for a minute. What a fantastic statement that is. That represents the dignity of humanity above anything in the animal world -- that we have an ability, a capacity within us to fuse with the very nature of God so that there is no distinction left between us and him as to identity. We are one spirit and from there on that becomes our true "you," our true identity.

This is what forms the basis for the New Covenant in the Word of God -- the availability of the life of God to the believer so that he faces every situation and every circumstance with a new power and a new ability to resist, a new ability to understand and to see things he never saw before. This explains the whole change that occurs in Christians when they become converted, regenerated, born again by the Spirit of God. There is a fantastic inward change that takes place that means our spirits have fused with his Spirit and from then on you can hardly tell the two apart -- we are one spirit with him.

Now all that serves to highlight the terrible effects of fornication and, as here at Corinth, prostitution. Look at Verse 18:

"Shun [flee] immorality." ["Flee fornication," literally is the term] {1 Cor 6:18a RSV}

That is Paul's apostolic advice as to how to handle the arousal of sexual desire when it is not able to be expressed within the proper terms of marriage. "Get out of there," Paul says. "Don't fool around with it; don't play with it. Get away from it; take to your heels." If you are in a parked car and you are beginning to get aroused, start the engine and drive home. If you are reading a magazine and you run across something smutty, drop it, discard it, get rid of it. If you are watching television and it turns toward this and you find yourself dealing with these things, change the channel or go read a good book or something else.

"Flee immorality" -- that is the advice everywhere in the Bible. Do not try to fight with it; do not try to

overcome it; do not try to suppress it. Get away. That is all. These are subtle, powerful forces, and the widespread destruction we see in lives around us is ample testimony to the subtlety with which they can come at us.

Then Paul goes on to say something very interesting, Verse 18b:

Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. {1 Cor 6:18b RSV}

Now many people have struggled with that verse because it seems to suggest that fornication, sexual promiscuity or sexual indulgence outside of marriage is unique in its effect upon us as a sin. It is not like other sins, and yet we know that other sins affect our bodies. Drunkenness, for instance, will destroy the human body. You only have to take a walk down through skid row somewhere to see the awful effects of drunkenness upon the human body. And there are other sins that affect the body. Drug abuse can destroy the mind, twist the features and turn the individual into a twitching, nervous wreck. Why didn't Paul mention that? Drug abuse was known in his day. Even gluttony can destroy the body. Too much food continually indulged in distorts and warps and changes the whole beauty of the human body and makes it into an ugly caricature of what God designed. (I can say that because I have lost 10 lbs. in the last two weeks). Even too much hard work will destroy the body. So what does Paul mean when he says other sins are "outside the body" but fornication is a sin against the body?

Well, the answer is given in Verse 19:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. {1 Cor 6:19-20a RSV}

That is why fornication is different from other sins. Here again Paul is reflecting on what we have just commented on that human nature is different than animal nature. It has a unique capacity: it is this marvelous capacity to hold God, to be intimately related to the greatness and the majesty and the glory of God, to have God in you. That is the temple -- God dwelling in something transforms it into a temple. But fornication defiles that temple. It offers the temple to another. It brings the body of that person who is the temple into a wrong union and therefore, it is basically the sin of idolatry. That is why in Colossians and other places the apostle links together "covetousness, which is idolatry." He means sexual covetousness, the desire for another person's body, is a form of idolatry.

Now only idolatry, the worship of another god, the substitution of a rival god, defiles the temple. That is why fornication has an immediate and profound but subtle effect upon the human psyche. It dehumanizes us. It animalizes us. It brutalizes us. Those who indulge in it grow continually more coarse, less sensitive, have less regard for the welfare of another, more self-centered, more desirous of having only their own needs met -- "To hell with the rest." That is what fornication does.

I have seen it destroy young people's relationships. A beautiful young couple came to me not long ago. Both of them were Christians, they had formed a close friendship, and they were enjoying one another and they told me about it. They were growing in the Lord and heading for marriage and then something happened. They began to fight, and I did not know what it was all about. Finally, they brought one of their quarrels to me and in the process of working it out I said to them, "Are you having sex together?" and they admitted they were. I said, "Well, this is the result of it. It is destroying your relationship." But they did not believe me and they went on. Sure enough, soon they ended it with great brokenness and hurt on both sides -- a painful episode remaining in each one of their lives, the woman in particular damaged by this. This is what fornication does.

Paul now closes with a beautiful summary.

You are not your own; you were bought with a price. {1 Cor 6:19b-20a RSV}

That is basic Christian truth. That is why we have it engraved right here on the front of the auditorium. "You

are not your own. You were bought with a price." This is something every Christian ought to remember every day of his life. You have no final right to yourself. God has ordained that we should have decisions that we have to make, and only we can make them. He does not take away our right of choice. He does not turn us unto robots and automatons, but, he says, finally we will have to account for the decisions we make. God always reserves the right, because he has bought us, he owns us, we are his by right of creation and of purchase, to send us where he wants us to go. He reserves the right to take away from our life whatever he sees is harmful or injurious to us, whether we like it or not, to give us both blessing and trouble alike as he sees that we need each, and to guide us as a loving Father to the place where we recognize that he owns us, we belong to him. God is glorified when any individual Christian begins to live on that basis: "Lord, you are the Lord of my life."

Therefore, Paul says (Verse 20b):

... glorify God in your body. {1 Cor 6:20b RSV}

This is what makes the world see that there is something different about Christians -- they have discovered the lost secret of their humanity. God has come to dwell in his temple again, and that temple should be maintained without defilement, without offering it to another, except as God himself has ordained in the beautiful sacrament of marriage.

In Chapter 7 we will go into that more, but here is where Paul has brought us. Let us stand together and we will be dismissed.

While we are standing here in the silence and loneliness of this moment, perhaps you will want to bow your head and thank God for your sexuality. Thank him for the choice he made that you should be a man or a woman, and that he has given you the powers and the drives and the urges to go along with it; thank him that he has given you the opportunity to demonstrate in terms of this life what a God-indwelt man or woman is like.

Prayer

Lord, we thank you for these searching words. We confess to you how feeble has been our understanding of our own nature, our sexuality, and all about us, how easily we have succumbed to the lies and illusions of the world around. Forgive us Lord, and help us in the light of revelation of truth to walk in different ways than we have ever walked before. Help us to present before the watching world a visible manifestation of the beauty of holiness and the joy of a life that walks in close communion with a God who dwells within. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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