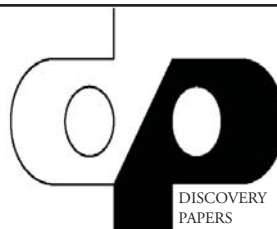


TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

SERIES: BODY. LIFE.



Catalog No. 20120624
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
1st Message
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Consider the parents of a strong willed three year old who is learning impulse control. Instructions about right and wrong are combined with reassurances of unconditional love. Consequences, acceptance, boundaries, and approval are all woven together. What is required in this moment—a stern time out, a shoulder shrug, or a game of hide and seek? Is this child afraid and confused or defiant? Parenting requires wisdom.

In the New Testament, the apostles had a similar responsibility, but on a much larger scale and with more at stake. A young church needs unchanging truth and reminders of grace, hope in suffering, steadiness amidst confusion, unmasking of hypocrisy, and the example of leaders who know God's strength and their own weakness. Previously we considered 1 Corinthians 1-5 (Catalogue # 20120101, 20120108, 20120115, 20120122, 20120205, 20120212) This message begins a sermon series in five parts which will examine texts in the rest of 1 Corinthians—the New Testament letter which most resembles a parent caring for a three year old. The five texts for this series have been chosen because the Greek word soma (translated 'body') in English appears in each of them. 'Body' signifies different things in this letter—sexual behavior, the communion loaf, believers living in community with various gifts, and our appearance in resurrection. To begin we turn to 6:12 and enter a debate between the immature Corinthians and the apostolic parent.

1 Corinthians 6:12:

¹²“Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³“Food for the stomach and the stomach for food”—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

We face an interpretive question here. Paul is responding to a letter he has received. Which of these phrases originate with the Corinthians and should appear in quotes and which are Paul's comments in response? Verse 12 is pretty straightforward. Almost every commentator agrees with

the representation of quote and subsequent comment as represented below. Verses 13-14 will offer more challenge.

1 Corinthians 6:12:

**¹²“Everything is permissible for me”—
but not everything is beneficial.
“Everything is permissible for me”—
but I will not be mastered by anything.**

“Everything is permissible for me” is a statement that can signify freedom in Christ—indeed Paul may have said this or something similar in the hearing of the Corinthians. However the same declaration can be made, as in the case of the Corinthians, by a petulant child who insists, “I can do whatever I want.”

We should note that the apostle doesn't challenge immaturity by resorting to legalism (a list of what is not permitted). Jesus' followers don't begin each day wary of food that is unclean, places that are out of bounds, people who are unwelcome, or ideas which are forbidden. Instead, Paul raises two important questions regarding life's options. 1) What is beneficial? and 2) What strengthens rather than 'masters' me?

Choosing what is good (beneficial) raises our sights beyond the easy path or temporary pleasure. Is joining a fantasy sports league permitted? Sure, but I must ask, “for me is this recreation or obsession?” Am I permitted to work in a grueling occupation for long hours day after day, year after year? Perhaps so, but why would I? What do I gain from a life with no Sabbath, with no margin for relationships.

Paul's second qualifier is 'not mastered.' In this the apostle recognizes that our decisions lead to destinations. Choices become routines and routines become habits. The question is important. Has my freedom to act become a pattern of behavior that I now cannot stop?

Dieting and exercise are good things; anorexia is not. Taken too far good choices can become destructive addictions. Social media is a good thing. Living a virtual life, cut off from real people, is not. Planning ahead is a good thing but a highly detailed, fear-driven, ten-year-plan for your life is not. Everything is permissible, but I must not

be mastered by anything.

Paul recognizes that declarations of freedom and discussions of food are preliminary to a debate about sexual behavior, particularly visiting temple prostitutes, who were abundant in the city. I have reordered the phrases in v.13-14 to indicate where I believe Paul is quoting his questioners and his answer in return.

1 Corinthians 6:13-14:

^{13a} *“Food for the stomach/ stomach for food”*

“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

^b *“but God will destroy them both”*

¹⁴By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

Some in Corinth argued that body-choices are of no consequence saying, in effect, that religion consists of high thoughts, loud songs, moments of ecstasy, meditation, and theological discussion but that physical desires and our choices regarding them are beneath God’s concern. Digestion is meaningless. Food and stomachs are unimportant and will be destroyed, they assert, and by extension sexual appetites and behaviors are considered the same.

We can engage in the same line of thought. The clothes I wear don’t matter—they are all going to wear out some day. Haircuts don’t matter. Short hair grows long again. Same with food; you ingest it and its gone. But the argument by analogy breaks down when extended to sexual choices. Sex with a prostitute is sin. Our bodies are not and never were intended for sexual immorality.

In fact, there are not religious and non-religious spheres of our lives. Followers of Christ should submit every decision to him, rather than build compartments in life where he has no say. I must be a disciple in all things: how I drive my car, how I pay my bills, the tone of voice I use with people I meet, what I consume or don’t consume, how I treat the environment, how I regard animals. Every thought should be taken captive to Christ. Verse 14 mentions our expectation of resurrection, a theme that will be expanded gloriously in chapter 15. Our bodies die, but only temporarily. We create a ‘self’ in our life choices and some day that self will be raised, ‘re-bodied’ in resurrection.

Paul now goes beyond answering theoretical questions about the nature of bodies. He will confront the teachers in Corinth who defended sex with prostitutes.

1 Corinthians 6:15:

¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

What do we make of the question, ‘do you not know?’ There were surely some of the apostle’s readers, newly converted, who did not know much about being united with Christ. For others this sentence is a forceful challenge—‘you know full well that your bodies are members of Christ, don’t you?’ And for a second time ‘do you not know’ is asked about the nature of sexual intercourse in v.16. Again, we should assume some of Paul’s readers understood biblical truth in this area and some did not.

As in the first century, new converts in our day who have been shaped by a world of promiscuity will need to be taught about body-choices and the indwelling life of Christ. ‘Do you not know?’ It is a privilege to instruct some who have never known the beautiful purposes for which God made them, to offer a good future to those for whom sex has been shallow and tawdry. Also, similar to Corinth, some contemporary Christians will act in defiance of truth they are well aware of. For both groups the apostle teaches with boldness and concludes with a command, ‘flee immorality’.

1 Corinthians 6:15-18:

¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

There are two big ideas. First, we must be sure that Jesus, residing in us, goes wherever we go. Second, sexual intercourse is never trivial—two are made one.

In Corinth, sex with temple prostitutes was widely accepted. Yet Paul confronts what was commonplace for them and recalls what we were made for. God gave the gift of sexuality to the first man and woman with the intention that two would be joined in body and spirit in order to build a life together. Knowing this, we must be sure that visiting prostitutes is an act of sinful rebellion with heart hardening consequences. But, more important is dishonor that attaches to the Lord. A believer who visits a brothel

takes Jesus with him. Paul recoils at the thought of Jesus made a participant in sexual sin.

Our lives change when we take the presence of Jesus seriously. I used to wear Jesus t-shirts and learned a lesson in doing so. When I wore a Jesus t-shirt I always treated people better. I tipped more generously. I was less likely to swear. My wardrobe made me aware of what is true all the time. The Lord goes with me everywhere I go. My behavior always includes him and either enhances or demeans his reputation.

I have a friend who worries me when he becomes extra demonstrative about his faith—volunteering for more service projects, praying more excitedly, singing louder. In the past these behaviors have typically occurred when he has fallen into old addictions and patterns of sin. Instead of facing the problem he hoped to balance out failure with fervency. Like the Corinthians he imagined that more religion would cancel body-choices that dishonor the Lord. Paul challenges such foolishness then and now.

The last sentence in verse 18 is provocative and has led to a wide range of interpretations. What is a unique ‘sin against his own body.’ We know that Paul has in mind the account of human creation found in Genesis two because of his reference to ‘two become one’ in v.16. I think Paul puts sexual sin in a special category not because it is most offensive or leads to the worst consequences, but because it goes back so far. It tampers with a purpose that precedes all other human experience. Theft, lies, violence, etc. all require social conditions that took time to develop. Sexual sin challenges the oldest work of God in making in his image, capable of bringing him honor.

The command that flows from this instruction is not difficult to understand: ‘flee sexual immorality’. It is foolish to imagine that we can stay near what is tempting and not finally give in to it. We shouldn’t contemplate the purposes of God for sexuality on the doorstep of a brothel, or en route to an evening of adultery.

In the final verses of chapter 6 the apostle turns from discussion of what to avoid to a marvelous description of a high calling.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

**¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple
of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you**

**have received from God? You are not your own;
²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor
God with your body.**

Here there are two assertions and followed by a command. First, your body should not to be seen as an inconsequential lump of clay. It is a temple, the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, and therefore of immense significance. Second, our lives—body, soul, and spirit—belong to God not to us. Jesus’ death on the cross paid the price to ransom us from sin and death. We are therefore called to bring honor to our master with the body-choices we make. No higher calling is imaginable. You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.