

After I got my flu shot at the end of the year, for one whole week, my arm felt like someone had given me a good punch. So today I'm preaching about the body based on personal experience. The body can be a real pain in the...well, body! I don't think much about my body, I just go around with it doing what I do, until it malfunctions. I suppose most people, most of the time, live that way too. Some people are more aware of their bodies, like the teenager on whose face a blemish is about to explode, or those who are feeble because their bodies don't work like they used to, or those that are ill and who fear with each new pain they may lose another bodily function.

But our only experience of life is in the body that God gave us, and that's what Paul writes about to the Corinthian church. Corinth, at that time, was the roughest seaport in the world. In nineteenth century America we would call it a “wild west” sort of town, with casinos, brothels, and taverns lining the streets. If we think it's hard to be a Christian now, believe me there were worse places to try to live for Jesus. Corinth was one of those sort of places.

To this depraved seaport Paul writes, reminding the new Christians that they're God's unique community, the people through whom God is bringing the world back to its original intention and the people through whom Jesus their Lord will be recognized and followed by the non-believing world. Because Christianity is so new and different Paul has to refresh their thinking about a great deal of the Christian faith. If we could slip away from our relatively easy suburban lives and slip into a rougher worldly way of life with sin's pressures all around us, we might relate better to the world the Corinthian Christians lived in. The ways of the world pressed much more forcefully on the Corinthian Christians from every side, even in how they consider their bodies.

Actually, that may be the one place we 21st century Americans can most easily identify with them. All their lives they had believed, with the rest of the Greek world, that the body was bad, a prison for the soul, a cemetery in which we're trapped alive, a corpse that we lug around with us. Because of that belief, the Greeks would either give up as many bodily enjoyments as possible, living a stoic lifestyle, or decide that bodily behavior didn't make any difference so they'd indulge in anything that would give them physical pleasure.

You can guess which of the two options most Corinthians chose. They understood quite well a part of Paul's message. We can hear in the first line of the passage that they've received and thoroughly accepted the news that Christianity is now separated from Jewish kosher ideas about ritually clean and unclean foods: “*Food for the stomach and the stomach for food...*” That seems to be one of their favorite slogans. Then they think that since the body is meant for sexual relations one should use it for what it's created—promiscuously if that's what a person desires. They can justify this as Christians because they believe that what they do with their bodies is morally neutral. It isn't important. Only the spiritual realm is significant.

Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, considers that our bodies are created by God and good, and what we do bodily is of supreme importance. So he sets out to tell these new Christians that having sexual relations with someone who's not your spouse affects the personality of each person involved, as food never does. So he tells us how important the human body is. He tells us that our bodies were created by God and for

God. As God resurrected Jesus bodily, so God will raise us bodily. It's our noble destiny to be joined to the resurrected Jesus in his body. Yet here in this world we are already part of Christ's body.

Verse 15 asks: "*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?*" Christians are the organs of Christ's resurrected body on earth. We're the membranes and muscles, the tissues and skin of Christ. We're how God continues Christ's work in the world. Being Jesus' body on earth means that Jesus dwells personally within us. So our bodily behavior expresses Jesus' personality, once again alive and active on earth. Much in this world will pass away but not what we do with our bodies. Our personalities expressed through our bodies are so important that Christ is united with us as intimately as in marriage.

Paul says in verse 17: "*But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*" In the Bible this is the language of marriage. The risen Christ lives so intimately with us that Paul pictures it as a marriage union. In fact, Paul says, this is how much God thinks of you and your bodily life in Christ: not only are you the body of Christ on earth and united as in marriage to Christ, but your body is now *the most sacred shrine in God's creation*. Think of the most awesome temple, the most holy site anywhere, and that is what your body is to God for others. You're the shrine where others will see and learn of God's love.

Each week before he reads the given Scripture in the worship service a friend of mine says, "As you listen to God's word read and preached, let God reveal to you the people you need to invite to worship next week." That's because God waits for us to worship bodily—in person. That's how important we are to God. God doesn't send a blockbuster movie like *The Last Jedi* to bring people back to God. And even though I am a big supporter of the Gideon's ministry, God doesn't simply send a Book to bring people back to God. We Christians aren't to sit around waiting for non-believers to pick up a Bible and read it. Sometimes that may happen, usually after God sends someone, not the Bible only, but a flesh and blood person to bring the message of God's love to others.

When we hand someone a Bible or share the story of the Bible with someone "the word of God" is being shared. The "word of God" is almost always something that is spoken by a believer, as it was spoken by a prophet or apostle, not just something printed in a book. The word of God gets out when we Christians speak the word to others.

After I chose the Scripture for this Sunday, like usual, I searched for hymns or songs to complement 1 Corinthians 6 in the worship service, and I found that this passage is among the vast majority of the Bible that does not have a hymn written about it. Shocking! I guess church hymns with the theme of sexual immorality don't get written very often. Go figure. Yet if I searched pop songs for the same theme, chances are, there would be a fairly long list. But let me quickly add that Paul's message is appropriate for us because so many of us Christians today practice a *spiritual immorality*, using our bodies and our lives to do so much less than Christ expects of us. God has made us for the most privileged of tasks—to be Christ's body on earth, to be the most holy place on the planet, and to share the most sacred of messages that was given to the church. Yet we treat the church like a kind of social club, administer it like a business, and attend it less than we attend the bowling league.

My friends, Christ died for you, not just for a bit of your life, but he died for the total you, for everything about you. Christ died to free you. Christ didn't do that so you could waste your bodily energies on less

than God's work, but so you could unite with Christ and the church and serve alongside others in Christ's body.

It is the Christian view of persons that makes so many attitudes and actions relating to sexuality in our society so troubling. Everything about pornography, for instance, uses sex in a way that devalues and prostitutes human lives. This same demeaning view of sex long ago infiltrated the world of advertising by using sex to sell anything and everything. If the basic principle here is "*Honor God with your bodies*" then there are certainly many more areas of application besides the one that Paul mentions.

Stated positively, a commitment to health that includes our eating and exercise habits would take on spiritual dimensions. Stated negatively, it would also mean that the abuse of our bodies with alcohol or other substances or by getting hooked on sugar (like I am) represents a failure to take seriously the truth that our bodies are the temple of Christ. On a more subtle level I think it would mean that a Christian cannot justify a pace of life that creates so much stress that it strains one's heart and brings on related health problems.

Paul's advice to "*Flee*" in verse 18 is still good advice. He wasn't saying just try to avoid temptations, but rather to run away from them. When I was a college student our campus pastor often reminded us that we will never un-see something we have already seen. We can never un-do something we have done. We ought not to underestimate the power of these things to draw us in or overestimate our ability to resist.

My question for Paul is this: "To where do we flee?" Our society is so saturated with a lesser view of persons and a self-absorbed view of the body that there's really no place far enough away. I can't move to a different state or take a different job. What I can and should do is to relate all of my life to God in Christ and find in that relationship a perspective for living productively and healthily. Whether it's a temptation to immorality or getting trapped in an unhealthy lifestyle, I personally need God's mercy and strength.

You'll remember that Christ's original earthly body got pretty beat up to free us from our sin. Paul explains, "*You are not your own; you were bought at a price.*" The phrase he uses is the Greek phrase for purchasing the freedom of a slave who is bought from slavery. You who had no hope of freedom; now you are finally free, fully free, eternally free; free to live as you were created to live. You were a slave, with no hope, shackled every day to do someone else's bidding. You didn't choose when you got up, where you went, or what you did. Your feelings weren't considered or your opinion asked. You went where you were told, and if you were smart you didn't say much about it.

Then out of the blue, along comes a person you've never seen before. He stops, looks in your eyes as though piercing your soul, picks you out, and buys you at a very high price as a slave is bought. Then he turns around and sets you free!

Wouldn't you bow down in deepest gratitude? Wouldn't you want to serve that person for the rest of your life—voluntarily, joyfully and bodily?

That's why the apostle says, "*You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.*" Amen.