

1 CORINTHIANS 6:15

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. We're approaching the end of the second major section of this letter, which covers chapters 5–6. The main focus in these chapters is on the theme of church purity and more specifically sexual purity. That's what we saw in chapter 5, where Paul rebuked the Corinthian believers for tolerating a man who was committing incest with his stepmother. They needed to excommunicate this man to maintain the purity of the church. Now at the beginning of chapter 6 Paul dealt with the sin of Christians taking each other to civil court. But then at the end of the chapter he returned to the topic of sexual immorality. The Corinthian believers were struggling with the sin of prostitution, and in verses 12–20 he addressed this issue head on.

But Paul started this passage by taking an interesting approach. In verse 12 he gave two quotations from the Corinthian believers that are exactly the same. Some of these people thought that everything was permissible for them. They thought that they could live however they wanted. But this view is a misunderstanding of Christian freedom. And Paul responded by saying that not everything is beneficial. We need to humble ourselves and do what's best for others according to God's Word. But Paul also responded by saying that he would not be mastered by anything. When God saved us, he set us free from slavery to sin and made us slaves of righteousness and ultimately God. So we shouldn't let sin gain any kind of foothold in our lives.

Then in verse 13 quoted the Corinthian believers once again. Some of them liked to say that food was for the stomach and the stomach was for food. And this statement is basically correct on the surface. The purpose of food is to be eaten, and the purpose of our stomachs is to digest food. As long as we don't go too far here and become gluttons, we can eat whatever we want as long as we're thankful to God for it. But the problem here is that some of the Corinthian believers also said that God would do away with food and the stomach. The Christian Standard Bible doesn't include this statement in the quotation, but Scripture teaches clearly that we're going to be eating and drinking during the future reign of Jesus on earth. So Paul would not have taught that food and our stomachs will be gone one day. Instead he was still quoting the Corinthian believers here. This interpretation is reflected in the NET Bible and the New International Version.

Now at first glance this error doesn't seem like much of an issue. But the problem is that the Corinthian believers didn't just think that our stomachs are going to disappear. Apparently they thought that our entire body will be gone for good one day. In ancient Greek philosophy it was commonly held that the body and all other material things were evil and would be destroyed. So many people concluded that what we

do with our bodies doesn't matter. We can eat as much as we want and have sex with anyone we want. But Paul responded to this view in verse 13 by saying that "the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord." There's nothing inherently evil about our bodies or any other material thing, because God made them and said that they were very good. But God didn't create our bodies so that we can enjoy sex however we want. Instead he made our bodies for his glory, and so we need to follow his instructions about sexual intimacy. We should have sex with only one person of the opposite gender after we've made a life-long commitment to that person in marriage.

So we need to live in submission to the lordship of Jesus. But he's not a cruel master who's going to exploit us or mistreat us. Instead he's a loving master who does what's best for us. That's why Paul ended verse 13 by saying that the Lord is for the body. His authority over our lives is for our benefit. He gave us our bodies so that we could enjoy a variety of physical pleasures. But I think that Paul was thinking primarily about something else here. In verse 14 Paul said that "God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." So when Paul said in verse 13 that the Lord is for the body, he was referring to the fact that one day God is going to raise our bodies from the dead. When we die our spirits go to be with the Lord, but when Jesus returns to earth, our spirits will go with him and be reunited with our bodies.

But before Paul talked about our resurrection in verse 14, he said that "God raised up the Lord." After Jesus died on the cross for our sins, he rose from the dead. His resurrection proved that he is God and that he has power over death. But the resurrection of Jesus did not just provide salvation from the penalty of our sins. It also ensures that we will be raised from the dead as well. That was Paul's point here in verse 14. He linked the resurrection of Jesus with our future resurrection. His resurrection serves as a guarantee that our bodies will come alive someday. Philippians 3:21 tells us that when Jesus returns, "he will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body."

So we're going to have a body that's very similar to the one Jesus had after he rose from the dead. Listen to how Paul described our resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44: "So it is with the resurrection of the dead: Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body." So our new bodies will be incorruptible, which means that we won't grow old or get sick. Our new bodies will also be glorious, which probably means that our appearance will be beautiful and attractive. There's your fountain of youth right there! We will also be more powerful than we are now, though of course we won't be as powerful as God. Finally, we're going to be spiritual, which can't mean that we will be non-physical. Instead it means that our lives will be in perfect harmony with the Holy Spirit. We will never sin again once we've been raised from the dead.

Doesn't this all sound too wonderful to be true? But we can be confident that it's going to happen, because God promised it to us in his Word. And God always keeps his promises because he's all-powerful and can do anything as long as it's consistent with his character. And this is what Paul stressed as he ended his statement in 1 Corinthians 6:14. He said that God "will also raise us by his power." God can raise us from the dead and give us wonderful resurrection bodies because he's all-powerful. He raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, and he can certainly raise us from the dead as well. And so we don't need to

be afraid of death or grieve excessively when our fellow Christians die. Instead we should look forward to the return of Christ and serve him faithfully while we wait.

Now let's move on to 1 Corinthians 6:15. We're ready to cover some new material. Look at what Paul wrote in this verse: "Don't you know that your bodies are a part of Christ's body? So should I take a part of Christ's body and make it part of a prostitute? Absolutely not!" Notice that Paul asked the Corinthian believers two questions in this verse. We haven't seen any questions in this passage recently, but you might remember that we saw a lot of questions earlier in the chapter. Paul actually asked a total of nine questions back in verses 1–9. He knew that questions are a powerful tool for getting people to examine themselves and think about what they're doing.

But Paul started three of these nine questions in basically the same way. Look at what he asked in the beginning of verse 2: "Or don't you know that the saints will judge the world?" Then look at his question in verse 3: "Don't you know that we will judge angels—how much more matters of this life?" Now look at his most recent question in verse 9: "Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom?" So in all three of these questions Paul used the phrase "don't you know that." And we even saw this phrase two other times earlier in the letter. It showed up in chapter 3 and verse 16 and then again in chapter 5 and verse 6. Now we're seeing it here in chapter 6 and verse 15 for the sixth time in this letter. And we're going to see it two more times in this chapter and then twice in chapter 9.

So this phrase appears a total of 10 times in 1 Corinthians. And we might think that Paul used it regularly in his other letters as well. But he actually used it only once outside this letter. It appears in Romans 6:16, but you won't find it anywhere else in Paul's other letters. Even outside Paul's letters this phrase shows up only once. In James 4:4 we have this question: "Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" So this phrase appears a total of 12 times in the New Testament, and 10 of them are found in 1 Corinthians. And so we should ask ourselves why Paul used it so many times in this letter. I think the reason is simply that he was trying to teach the Corinthian believers a lesson. They thought too highly of themselves and boasted about their knowledge and wisdom. So Paul knocked them off their pedestal and brought them down a few notches. He was showing them that they still had much to learn.

Now this doesn't mean that the Corinthian believers didn't have any knowledge about spiritual things. After all, we know from Acts 18:11 that Paul taught the word of God in Corinth for a year and a half. But the problem was that these people often didn't live in accordance with the knowledge that they had. So I think that the obvious answer to Paul's first question here in 1 Corinthians 6:15 is yes. The Corinthian believers didn't have as much knowledge as they thought, but they almost certainly knew what Paul was talking about in this question. The problem was that they weren't applying this knowledge to their lives. And so Paul had to pause and remind them that their bodies were a part of Christ's body.

Let's talk about the Greek word for bodies. It's used 142 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote 91 of them, which is almost two-thirds. And 46 of those 91 occurrences are found here in 1 Corinthians. That's just over half of the number of times that Paul used this word. So this term was one of Paul's favorite words in this letter. And like many words it can be used in a variety of ways. Sometimes Paul used this

word figuratively to refer to the church. In Colossians 1:18 he said that Jesus “is the head of the body, the church.” In Romans 12:5 he said that we “are one body in Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 12:27 he wrote, “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it.”

So in these three verses Paul was using the word “body” figuratively to refer to a unified group of people who trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. And he wasn’t just referring to a local church but to the universal church. He was talking about all Christians who have ever lived or who will ever live. We’re all part of the body of Christ. And the reason the church is called the body of Christ is that we belong to him. He died on the cross to save us from our sins, and so now he’s our master. That’s why Paul said in Colossians 1:18 that he’s the head of the body. In a physical body the head is where the brain is located, and our brain is what sends instructions to the rest of our body. In the same way Jesus has given us instructions in his Word, and we need to obey them and submit to his authority.

So the Greek word for body can be used figuratively to refer to the church. But most of the time this word is used literally in the New Testament to refer to our physical bodies. And that’s clearly what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 6:15. We already saw this word twice back in verse 13, and we took for granted that Paul was talking about our physical bodies there. He said that “the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” And here in verse 15 Paul asked, “Don’t you know that your bodies are a part of Christ’s body?” Now at first glance it seems like Paul used the Greek word for body twice in this question. The first one is apparently plural and is used literally to refer to our physical bodies, while the second one is evidently singular and is used figuratively to refer to Christ’s body or the church.

But in the original text the Greek word for body appears only once in this question. And we can confirm this fact by looking at other Bible translations. The New American Standard Bible says, “Do you not know that your bodies are parts of Christ?” The English Standard Version and the Legacy Standard Bible are very similar. They both have this question: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” So all three of these translations end the question with the word “Christ,” not the word “body.” And these Bible versions are giving us a literal translation of the original Greek here. The Greek word for body is used only in the middle of this question and not at the end as well.

Now we might be tempted to criticize the Christian Standard Bible at this point. After all, why would the translators put the word “body” here at the end of this question if there’s no basis for it in the Greek text? Well, sometimes a literal translation doesn’t make a lot of sense, and so translators will often make adjustments so that the text is easier to read and understand. And I think that is what’s happening here in verse 15. Look at what Paul said about our physical bodies in the first question. He said that our “bodies are part of Christ’s body.” Now the New American Standard Bible says here that our “bodies are parts of Christ.” But what does it mean that our bodies are parts of Christ? That statement doesn’t really make a lot of sense.

So let’s take a closer look at the Greek word for part. It’s actually in the plural as indicated by the more literal translations. This word is used 34 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote all but five of them.

And normally this word just refers to a part of the human body. James 3:5 says that “though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things.” But this word can also be used figuratively to being part of a group. Earlier I read 1 Corinthians 12:27, where Paul said, “Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it.” We have a similar statement in Ephesians 5:30, where Paul said that “we are members of his body” or Christ’s body. In both of these verses the Greek word for members is the same one that Paul used here in 1 Corinthians 6:15. Paul was saying that we are part of the church.

And I think it’s pretty clear that Paul was saying basically the same thing in our passage. When he said that our bodies are parts of Christ or members of Christ, he wasn’t referring to specific body parts. He wasn’t saying that our tongue is part of our physical body. Instead he was talking about our physical bodies as a whole. And when he said that our bodies are parts of Christ, he wasn’t talking about who Jesus is as a person. He wasn’t saying that the bodies of Christians somehow form the essence of Jesus. Instead he was focused on how we’re part of the church. We’re members of the figurative body of Christ. So the Christian Standard Bible is showing us the right way to interpret Paul’s first question in verse 15. He didn’t literally refer to Christ’s body here, but I think that’s what he was implying.

So we’ve looked at Paul’s first question in verse 15, and now let’s move on to his second question. He asked, “So should I take part of Christ’s body and make it part of a prostitute?” Paul started this question with the word “so,” and this conjunction just shows that he was drawing a conclusion. His second question was based on his first question. And that’s clear when we look at the first part of this second question. It has the phrase “part of Christ’s body,” which is exactly what we saw at the end of the first question. As before there’s no Greek word for body here, but once again I believe it’s implied. Paul was referring to the fact that we’re members of the church, just like he did at in the first question. And more specifically he was talking about our physical bodies. It’s not just our spirits that are part of the church but our bodies as well. Our bodies and our spirits together make up who we are.

So Paul was talking about the possibility of taking our physical body, which is part of Christ’s body, and making it part of a prostitute. Notice that there are two verbs in this question: “take” and “make.” Now the Christian Standard Bible and all the other translations that I looked at treat both of these words as main verbs and link them together with the word “and.” But the Greek word for take is actually a participle, and there is no Greek word here that means “and.” Let me give you a more literal translation of this question: “So taking the parts of Christ, should I make them the parts of a prostitute?” In other words, the main focus in this question is at the end where the main verb is. Paul was addressing the possibility of using our bodies to have sex with a prostitute. We have two more occurrences of the Greek word for part here, and both of them are plural like we saw in the first question. All three of them are referring to the bodies of Christians.

But before we focus our attention on the end of this second question, let’s linger a bit longer on the first part of the question. After all, the beginning of this question lays the foundation for the rest of it. Here’s the point of the first half of the question: as Christians we need to remember that our bodies belong to Christ and are part of the church. And so if we have sex with a prostitute, we’re taking something that belongs to Christ and acting like it doesn’t belong to him. Now the Greek verb for take usually has the

idea of lifting something up and carrying it somewhere else. And so the idea here is that we're removing our bodies from the sphere of righteousness and taking them to the sphere of unrighteousness. We're leaving the safety of the church to indulge in worldliness. We're taking what belongs to Christ and giving it to someone who's opposed to Christ.

And notice that Paul used the word "Christ" in both of the questions in this verse. In the previous two verses Paul referred to Jesus as the Lord, but here he switched to the word "Christ." We saw both of these titles used together back in verse 11, but in the rest of the chapter Paul used each of these terms individually. And the word "Christ" emphasizes that Jesus is the promised Messiah. He's the anointed one who serves as the ultimate prophet, priest, and king. He spoke God's words to us, he offered himself as our sacrifice for sin, and one day he's coming back to reign on the earth. So Jesus is completely worthy of our worship and devotion. But apparently some of the Corinthian believers were not fully devoted to Christ. And that's why Paul asked this second question in verse 15: "Should I take part of Christ's body and make it part of a prostitute?"

Now it's interesting that Paul switched from a second person plural pronoun in the first question to a first person singular pronoun in the second question. But we shouldn't read too much into this change. Paul wasn't saying that he could take the bodies of the Corinthians and make them the parts of a prostitute. And he certainly wasn't just talking about his own body, because the Greek word for part here is plural in all three cases, as I mentioned earlier. So I think Paul was just using the word "I" to refer to himself as a representative for the Corinthian believers. After all, they were the ones who were struggling with the temptation to go to a prostitute. But Paul didn't want to keep hammering them with a second person pronoun over and over. So he switched to a first person pronoun to remove some of the sting of his rebuke. I think he wanted all of us to put ourselves in his shoes and ask ourselves this question. Should we make our bodies the parts of a prostitute?

Now before we look at Paul's answer to this question, let's talk about the Greek word for prostitute. It's used 12 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote only two of them. The first one is found in this verse, and the second one is found in the very next verse. But this word comes from the same root as two other words that we've seen in chapters 5 and 6. In chapter 5 and verse 1 and again in chapter 6 and verse 13, we saw the Greek word *porneia*, which refers to the act of sexual immorality. Then in chapter 5 and verses 9–11 and again in chapter 6 and verse 9, we saw the Greek word *pornos*, which refers to a sexually immoral person. Both of these words are just referring to sexual sin in general.

But now we're seeing the Greek word *porne*, and it refers to someone who engages in sexual relations for hire. So this word is focused on a specific type of sexual sin. In verse 13 Paul referred to sexual immorality in general, but here in verse 15 we can see that he was thinking about prostitution. In the chapter 5 the focus was on the sin of incest, but here in chapter 6 Paul switched to the sin of prostitution. The only situation in which God authorizes us to have sexual intimacy is when we've committed ourselves to a long-term relationship in marriage with someone of the opposite gender. And so prostitution by definition is out of bounds. A prostitute has sex with lots of people and even makes money doing so. It's impossible for a prostitute to have an exclusive long-term commitment in the area of sexual intimacy.

So it's no surprise that Paul answered his second question in verse 15 with a very strong negative response: "Absolutely not!" The Greek phrase here is used 15 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote all but one of them. This verse is the only place where he used the phrase in this letter, but he used it 10 times in Romans and three times in Galatians. Perhaps the most memorable one is in Romans 6. Listen to what he wrote in verses 1–2: "What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" Once again Paul used this phrase right after he asked a question, just like he did in 1 Corinthians 6:15. And in both places he gave a very strong negative response to the question.

So in 1 Corinthians 6:15 Paul was showing us just how terrible it is for a Christian to go to a prostitute. People who work as prostitutes are not part of the body of Christ. You can't hold the occupation of prostitution and be a Christian, because it involves living in continual sin. So why would a Christian want to go to an unbeliever and pay for sex with someone who's opposed to Christ? It's a pretty crazy idea when you think about it. But that's what can happen when we start to move away from the Lord. If we steer off course just a little, eventually we will end up far from our destination. So we must guard our hearts carefully and make sure that we stay on the straight and narrow path of holiness. Let's close in prayer and ask for God's help to do that.