

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. We've almost reached 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 Paul 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 most likely the next statement should be included in the quotation as well. They also said that God would do away with food and the stomach. But Scripture teaches clearly that we're going to be eating and drinking during the future reign of Jesus on earth. And so the Corinthian believers were incorrect here. But the bigger problem is that they 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. So they concluded that what we do with our bodies doesn't matter, especially in matters of sexuality. That's why Paul responded to the quotation by saying that "the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord." God made our bodies for his glory, and so we need to follow his instructions about sexual intimacy.

But Paul ended verse 13 by turning his statement around; he said that the Lord is for the body. His authority over our lives is for our benefit. And I think verse 14 reveals the primary benefit that Paul was thinking about. He said that "God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." Our bodies are not going to disappear completely after we die. Instead God is going to raise our bodies from the

dead, just like he raised Jesus from the dead. And the reason we can believe this promise is that God is all-powerful. He can do anything as long as it's consistent with his character. 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 when our bodies will be transformed.

Then in verse 15 Paul asked the Corinthian believers two questions. First he asked them, "Don't you know that your bodies are a part of Christ's body?" Our physical bodies are not irrelevant; they're part of who we are. And since we belong to Christ's body, the church, so do our physical bodies. He's the head of the church, and so our bodies are under his authority. Then in the second question Paul asked, "So should I take a part of Christ's body and make it part of a prostitute?" Here we can see that Paul was focused on a specific type of sexual sin in this passage. He was talking about someone who engages in sexual relations for hire. Prostitution is a severe violation of God's instructions about sex being limited to marriage. It's impossible for a prostitute to have an exclusive long-term commitment in the area of sexual intimacy. You can't hold the occupation of prostitution and be a Christian, because it involves living in continual sin.

So it's no surprise that Paul answered his second question in verse 15 with a very strong negative response: "Absolutely not!" Paul was showing us just how terrible it is for people who are part of Christ's body to make their own body part of a prostitute. And in verse 16 Paul talked more about what it means to make your body part of a prostitute. He said, "Don't you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her?" So Paul asked another question here, and he was talking about the physical unity that takes place during sexual intercourse. There's a sense in which two separate bodies become one body at that time because of their close connection. They are joined together and become united.

And Paul defended his observation here by giving us a quotation from Genesis 2:24. He wrote, "For Scripture says, The two will become one flesh." Now the word "flesh" there isn't just talking about a sexual relationship. It's talking about a family relationship and the creation of a new family unit. That's why the beginning of Genesis 2:24 says that a man leaves his father and mother when he bonds with his wife. Marriage involves much more than sexual intimacy. It also includes a deep mental, emotional, and spiritual connection. But of course Paul was thinking primarily of sexual intimacy when he quoted this verse in 1 Corinthians 6:16. And I think his point was that sex with a prostitute is a perversion of God's good plan for sex. We shouldn't settle for casual sex with a prostitute or anyone else. God designed sexual intimacy to be more enjoyable if it's part of a deeper bond in marriage.

Then in verse 17 Paul said that "anyone joined to the Lord is one spirit with him." We shouldn't join ourselves to a prostitute because we've already joined ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a special connection to Jesus because of his death and resurrection to pay for our sins. And I think the word "spirit" here is probably a reference to the Holy Spirit. The way that we're joined to Jesus is through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. We're part of the body of Christ because the Spirit put us there when God saved us. Because of our unity with Jesus through the Spirit, we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing. But this privilege comes with the responsibility of submitting to Jesus as Lord in every area of our lives, including our sexuality.

So in verse 18 Paul gave a short but powerful command: “Flee sexual immorality!” There are times when the danger of sexual immorality is so close that we need to run away from it. That’s what happened to Joseph with Potiphar’s wife in Genesis 39. Sexual immorality is a very dangerous sin, and in the rest of verse 18 Paul talked about why we need to run away from it. He said that “every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body.” Now certainly there are other sins that are directed primarily against our body, like drunkenness and gluttony. But sexual immorality is different because it involves being joined physically to someone who’s off limits. And so this union is in direct competition with our union with Christ. It’s a direct violation of our relationship with Jesus.

Now let’s move on to 1 Corinthians 6:19. We’re ready to cover some new material. But verse 20 flows right out of verse 19, so let’s read both verses. Paul wrote, “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.” Notice that Paul started verse 19 with a question, and it begins with a phrase that should be very familiar to you by now. We’ve seen this phrase “don’t you know that” a total of six times in this chapter. It appears another four times in the rest of this letter, but Paul only used it once in all his other letters. And I think the reason he used it so many times here is that he was trying to teach the Corinthian believers a lesson and confront them about their pride. They thought too highly of themselves and boasted about their knowledge and wisdom.

But 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 question here in 1 Corinthians 6:19 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 body was a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now if you have a different translation than the Christian Standard Bible, you might see a small word at the very beginning of the verse right before the phrase “don’t you know.” It’s the word “or,” and it appears in a variety of translations like the English Standard Version, the Legacy Standard Bible, the New American Standard Bible, and the NET Bible. That’s because there’s a Greek word that means “or” at the beginning of this verse. Now normally this word introduces an alternative. For example, if you go out to eat for breakfast, you might be given the choice to have either bacon or sausage with your meal. But this doesn’t mean that Paul was giving an alternative perspective on sexual immorality in verse 19 compared to verse 18. Instead he was just supplementing his earlier teaching. He was simply addressing the situation from a different angle. But he was continuing to confront the sin of sexual immorality, and he reminded us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word for body is the same one that we’ve already six times in the last six verses. In each case Paul was using the word literally to refer to our physical bodies. And that’s obviously the case here as well. Paul was building on what he said in verse 18 about how the person who is sexually immoral sins against

his own body. And he supported this statement in verse 19 by saying that our body is a temple. The Greek word for temple is used 45 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote only eight of them. But half of those eight occurrences are found here in this letter. We already saw the first three of them in chapter 3 and verses 16–17. There Paul talked about how the church in Corinth as a whole was a temple. But here he applied that image to the bodies of individual believers.

Now 1 Corinthians isn't the only letter where Paul used the image of a temple to describe Christians. In Ephesians 2:21 he talked about the fact that the church was growing "into a holy temple in the Lord." In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul said that "we are the temple of the living God." And then he went on to quote Leviticus 26:12. There God said, "I will dwell and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." Now at that point in Israel's history, there was no temple yet. The Israelites were still on Mount Sinai and were receiving God's laws for them. But they had already constructed the tabernacle, which was the predecessor of the temple and a portable version of it. Earlier in Exodus 25:8 God had told Moses, "They are to make a sanctuary for me so that I may dwell among them." And when the tabernacle was finished, Exodus 40:34 tells us that "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." The same thing happened when the temple was finished; 1 Kings 8:11 says that "the glory of the LORD filled the temple."

So the whole point of the tabernacle and then the temple was to provide a dwelling place for the visible presence of God. It was a reminder that God was living among the Israelites. But the sanctuary of the temple was off limits to everyone except the priests. And so there was a curtain that separated the sanctuary from the rest of the temple. But when Jesus died on the cross, that curtain was torn from the top to the bottom, which indicated that only God could have done it. The point was that God's people no longer needed a priest to have access to him, because Jesus fulfilled the role of high priest. But the tearing of the curtain also showed that God no longer lived in the sanctuary. That temple was part of a corrupt religious system that was full of people who had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. And as a result God arranged for it to be destroyed by the Romans about 40 years later in A.D. 70.

But the destruction of the physical temple in Jerusalem was all part of God's plan to shift the special manifestation of his presence somewhere else. Shortly after Jesus died and rose again, God began to live in his people. And that's what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 6:19. He said that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. What this statement means is that the Holy Spirit lives in us. And that's exactly what Paul went on to say in this verse. He referred to "the Holy Spirit who is in you." So it isn't God the Father or God the Son who lives in us. God the Spirit is the one who's living in us. And Jesus promised that this would happen right before his death. Listen to what he said to his disciples in John 14:16–17: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn't see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you."

So Jesus said that the Father would give the Spirit to live in his disciples. But then in John 14:26 Jesus said that the Father would send the Spirit in the name of Jesus. And in John 15:26 Jesus said that he would send the Spirit from the Father. So both the Father and the Son were involved in sending the Spirit to live in the disciples. And this fact is reflected in the wording that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 6:19. He referred

to “the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God.” So Paul didn’t specify whether he was talking about God the Father or God the Son. He could have been talking about either one of them, or more likely he was referring to both of them. Both the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples, just as Jesus had promised them.

This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost a short time after Jesus ascended to heaven. That’s when Acts 2:4 tells us that all the followers of Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit wasn’t just going to live in the original disciples. In verse 38 Peter said that everyone who repented would be forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So from that point forward the Spirit has lived in every single believer. And this fact is confirmed for us in Romans 8. Listen to what Paul said in verse 9: “You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.” In other words, we don’t belong to Jesus if the Spirit isn’t living in us. The Holy Spirit indwells every single true Christian.

So God gave us the Holy Spirit as a wonderful gift of his grace. But why did he do that? What were his reasons for sending the Holy Spirit to indwell us? Well, we’ve already heard about one of the reasons in John 14:16, where Jesus called the Holy Spirit a counselor. The Greek word for counselor is very broad and has a variety of nuances, but it probably refers to the Holy Spirit as someone who encourages us and helps us during the challenges of the Christian life. We see another reason that the Holy Spirit indwells us in Ephesians 1. In verse 14 Paul said that “the Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.” So God gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that one day we’re going to receive the inheritance that’s waiting for us in heaven.

But in 1 Corinthians Paul gave some additional reasons for the Holy Spirit’s presence in us. In chapter 2 and verse 12 he said that “we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us from God.” So another reason God gave us the Spirit was that we could understand God’s Word. This verse is teaching what we call the doctrine of illumination. But when Paul said in chapter 6 and verse 19 that the Holy Spirit is in us, the focus is on his sanctifying work in our lives. The Holy Spirit lives in us to make us more holy like him. That’s why Paul called him the Holy Spirit. The word “holy” refers first of all to the holiness of the Spirit, but it also implies that the Spirit is making us holy as well. The Holy Spirit is transforming us into the image of Jesus so that we’re becoming more and more separate from sin.

But many of the Corinthian believers were fighting against the Spirit’s sanctifying work in their lives. They were the temple of the Holy Spirit, but they were going to pagan temples to engage in sexual immorality! Instead of worshiping the Lord in the temple of their body, they were essentially worshiping idols at the pagan temples as they had sex with prostitutes. In other words, these people were defiling God’s temple! They had received the Holy Spirit as a wonderful gift from God, but they failed to recognize that this amazing privilege comes with an important responsibility. We must pursue holiness and turn away from sin. We must understand that our bodies don’t belong to ourselves but to God.

And that’s exactly what Paul focused on at the end of verse 19. Look at what he said here: “You are not

your own.” Now in the Christian Standard Bible we have a new sentence here that continues into verse 20. But this translation is missing a word at the beginning of the sentence. The original Greek text has a word here that usually just means “and.” We can see this word in more literal translations like the Legacy Standard Bible, the New American Standard Bible, and even the NET Bible. But if we add this word to the Christian Standard Bible, then it doesn’t make a lot of sense. Sometimes we can start new sentences with the word “and,” but usually this word creates a stronger link with what comes before. It usually introduces a statement that’s part of the same sentence as the previous material. And I think that’s precisely what’s going on here.

We can see this interpretation in the three Bible translations that I just mentioned. All of them reflect the view that there’s just one sentence in this verse and that we don’t have a new sentence until the beginning of verse 20. In other words, the question that Paul asked in verse 19 continues until the end of the verse. So Paul didn’t just ask the Corinthian believers if they knew that their body was a temple of the Holy Spirit. He also asked them if they knew that they were not their own. They should have understood each of these facts, but some of them weren’t living according to this knowledge. So Paul needed to remind them about both of these truths.

And what we see here is that the second truth flows naturally from the first one. If God lives in us, then we belong to him. The Holy Spirit’s not just along for the ride; he’s here to rule over us. We are not autonomous and free to do whatever we want. Instead we must submit to God’s authority in every area of our lives, including what we do with our bodies. That’s ultimately why we shouldn’t commit sexual immorality. It’s inappropriate for our bodies to be joined to a prostitute or anyone else who’s not our spouse because it’s forbidden by God. This is why Paul reacted so strongly to the Corinthian statement that he quoted in verse 12. They claimed that everything was permissible for them, but that’s just not true. We belong to God, and so we shouldn’t do anything that he tells us not to do. Paul actually laid the foundation for this point back in chapter 3 and verse 23 where he said that “you belong to Christ.” That’s why we must live in obedience to him.

I think this is the main reason that people choose not to receive God’s gift of salvation. If they truly understand the gospel, then they know that they must turn away from their sins. But they don’t want to do that. They don’t want to give up their autonomy and submit to Jesus as their master. They want to keep doing whatever they want with their bodies. And when unbelievers reject Jesus and suppress the truth in their unrighteousness, God hands them over to greater sin. In Romans 1:24 Paul said that “God delivered them over in the desires of their heart to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves.” Then in verse 26–27 Paul said that “God delivered them over disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. The men in the same way also left natural relations with women and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.”

So what we see here is that rampant sexual immorality in a culture is a sign that most of the people have rejected God. And so he is preparing them for judgment by delivering them over to more and more sexual sin, especially homosexuality. That’s what was happening in the Roman Empire during Paul’s time,

and we're seeing it again in our culture today. We live among many people who think that they have the right to have sex with anyone they please. In addition, some of them think that they can identify themselves by the gender of their choice! Occasionally they even mutilate their bodies to conform to those genders. And they try to do the same thing to others, including helpless little children who don't understand what's going on.

But Genesis 1:27 says that God created human beings as male and female. And whenever he creates a new life at conception, he assigns our gender to us. We're lying to ourselves if we think that we can choose our gender or invent new genders. Instead we must submit to God and the gender that he gave us. And we must also submit to God's rules about marriage and sexual intimacy. God designed marriage to be a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman. That's the only relationship where sexual activity should take place. Hebrews 13:4 tells us that "marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers."

So what we're seeing in 1 Corinthians 6:19 is that our physical body is not worthless. Our body is meaningful because God created it. And now that we've put our faith in Jesus, he lives in it as well! Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son gave us the Holy Spirit as a wonderful gift to help us grow in holiness. And so we must be very careful what we do in our bodies. We must guard ourselves against any sort of rebellion against God's plan for our sexuality. We shouldn't even desire to do anything that would be sexually impure. We must find joy and satisfaction first of all in God and then in the marriage partner he has given to us. And if we're single, we need to serve the Lord faithfully during this season of life. We should make the most of our singleness, and if we desire to be married, we should wait patiently for God to provide a spouse. Let's close in prayer and ask for his help to remain sexually pure.