

“Honor God With Your Body”

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

The Scriptures teach us that in the beginning God created male and female humans as physical beings (embodied) and that this was “very good”. Bodies are the means by which humans worship God (Rom. 12:1); and it is human bodies that God plans to resurrect (1 Cor. 15). Although human desires became distorted by sin (e.g. Gen. 3:16), God takes joy in fulfilling the deepest and best desires that he has put within his children (Ps. 20⁴; 37⁴) and Jesus himself knew the joy of deep human friendships (Jn. 11³ & 36).

But there were many other popular views of the body in ancient times that expressed themselves very differently. For example, the Corinthians had bought into the popular notions of their day regarding personal autonomy (“I am free to do anything”) and the idea that their bodies had nothing to do with their spiritual lives. Thus they viewed sex as purely casual, and put the fulfillment of their sexual desires on par with any other bodily desires and needs (“Food for the body, and the body for food”). Sounds rather contemporary doesn’t it? Paul’s response is positively worth exploring.

Opening Question(s) – Choose one

- How do you react when you hear about serious moral & spiritual problems in your church? Why?

Study Questions

- 1) **Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.** While many actions and activities are not sinful in themselves, what two tests will help us determine what and what not to do (verse 12)? Give some examples of legitimate activities which may not meet these guidelines.
- 2) From this passage, what are Paul’s arguments against sexual immorality?¹ Which one is the most convincing to you?
- 3) What do verses 13-14 teach about our bodies and their purpose in God’s plan?
- 4) What connection is there between the “spiritual” and the “physical”? How does this make sexual sin unique?
- 5) Paul calls the body “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (vv.18-20). How does the biblical view of the body presented here compare/contrast with views held today (see book excerpt on the following page)?
- 6) One commentator noted that “Even though we recite the Apostles’ Creed that says, ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body,’ many Christians image their future hope in disembodied terms (e.g. “I’ll Fly Away”).” He calls this “a betrayal” of the New Testament teaching. Do you agree? Disagree? Why?
- 7) In Western culture today, and even within the church, Corinthian like slogans (e.g. “rights”, “freedom of choice,” “self-determination,” “autonomy”) are common. How might our contemporary debates change if we stopped reverting to such slogans and listened to Paul (“*you are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*”)?
- 8) How can a biblical understanding of your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit lead to a healthy balance of bodily control and bodily celebration?

¹ Paul weaves together three different arguments: an argument based on the resurrection of the body (vv.13-14), an argument based on the body as a temple for the Holy Spirit (vv.18-19), and an argument based on the Lord as the rightful owner of the body (vv.15-17,20).

The following is an excerpt from chapter 3 of Vaughan Robert's book, Transgender.

The Bible tells us that we did not emerge, by accident, from the cosmic soup. It states clearly that we've been created by a loving God. That means that we human beings are creatures, not machines—and that has a huge impact on how we think about our liberty.

True freedom, according to Scripture, is found not in asserting our radical independence and trying to be who we're not made to be. True freedom is found in embracing and *being who we are*. A fish that decides to make a bid for freedom by jumping out of the water will not be free—because it is created to live in the environment of water. And as soon as we try and become what we are not, far from enjoying freedom, we can't expect to flourish.

This conviction—that we're creatures, not machines—has massive implications. John Wyatt, in his book Matters of Life and Death, talks about a “Lego kit”¹⁹ view of the human body. If we have just emerged from the primeval slime by chance, then there is no design whatsoever in how we happen to be. We are simply a collection of constituent parts that can be changed and adapted as we like. You can try to improve and upgrade to a different model—you can reprogram the machine because that's what we are. The structure of the body is value free, so if you want to change your sex, that's fine. If you want to make yourself bionic, that's fine too. In the words of the old Lego advert, “The only limitation is your own imagination”.

Art Restoration

John Wyatt contrasts that with what he calls the “art restoration view”,^{pp.97-100} because, in the Christian worldview, we are not machines—we are flawed masterpieces. We'll come to the “flawed” part later, but do you see the difference? If you see a work of art and you're asked to restore it, you don't look at it and say, “Well, I think he would look much nicer with a pair of spectacles”. Or, “This scene would look better with a car instead of a hay cart”. To do that is to break the code of the art restorer. Art restorers respect the work, and know that their job is to bring out the artist's original intention. They work at cleaning and restoring the vivid colours. They study the work and the painter so that they can carefully get it back to what it once was. They work so that people can see the original in all its glory.

Humanity too is the work of an artist—a divine artist. Humankind is God's masterpiece—the pinnacle of his work of creation. Genesis tells us that when he looked at the people he had made, he declared them “very good”. So identity is not for us to create. It sounds very freeing to say, “You can become who you want to be”. But our actual identity, in that way of thinking, is completely invented, and therefore fluid, and therefore profoundly unstable.

It's no wonder that our culture, and many individuals within it, suffer from an identity crisis. Perhaps that explains the profound insecurity and anxiety of many young people. When I was at school, the biggest decision I had to make was what subjects to choose for my exams. Now teenagers are having to consider how to define their sexuality and gender.

An insecure identity may also be behind the growing trend for visiting speakers to be “de-platformed” by Student Unions. The extreme sensitivity of some groups, and the determination of others to protect them from hearing anything that might offend them, does suggest a deep insecurity. The resulting threat to free speech has caused widespread concern.

But the Bible brings great news to our culture with its identity crisis. And great news for people who are trying to work out who they are. It's wonderfully freeing to know that we live in a world made by a loving God, where identity is not something we've somehow got to create for ourselves. Our identity is a given. We're human beings, made in the image of God; we are creatures, not machines.

The ancient Greeks had a very low view of the body. The psyche, the soul, was the real you, but the body would just be discarded at death and then you'd go to the spirit realm. So in much Greek thinking, salvation was all about the freeing of the soul from the body that dragged it down. Our culture has largely returned to that mindset.