

INTRODUCTION

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➤ *Infatuation with the human body, obsession with human sexuality*

This is the age we live in, the society we find ourselves today.

We spend millions of dollars annually on diet books and vitamins, fashions and fitness clubs, exercise equipments and cosmetics. Daily, without fail, the media will show us finely tuned bodies and trimmed bodies, and then tell us that this is how we ought to look like, this is the body we must strive for. Of course, we were not told that that perfect and beautiful body is not real, that not even the models have it. Their photos are taken and then the computer takes over to do further touch-up before we are allowed to see the bodies!

Alongside our fascination with the human body, people today are obsessed with sex. Just look at the advertisements. Everything from ice cream to motorcars, even promoting radio program, we are bombarded with both explicit and implicit sexual message. Someone pointed out that you can't even go and read a decent news website without being confronted with either a picture or a headline that has sexual overtones.

Amazingly, the same infatuation and obsession are true for the people living in Corinth in the 1st century!

➤ *Hedonism, asceticism*

Confronted by the body-crazy outlook and sex-crazy mentality, we can have one of these two responses:

(i) Ignore.

We ignore the body, ignore the media and ignore the world around us. We can try to shut ourselves from the world and suppress/deny our appetites, our desires, our inclinations, our drives.

(ii) Indulge.

Since we can't win, we might as well go along with it! If you can't beat them, join them! The only way to quench our fiery passion to indulge and satisfy it!

Once again, amazingly, we find the people @ Corinth in the first century having the same two responses, though fueled by different philosophical reasons. The Greeks believed that the body is useless, is a hindrance, and is like a prison. Salvation is to get the soul of the body, to have no body. Therefore, this body doesn't really matter to God or to man. It doesn't really matter what you do or don't do with/to your body.

In view of this, some of the Greeks take the position of indulging their body, of giving their body over to all the lusts of the flesh that they can possibly get their hands on. They are called 'hedonists'. Since it's only the soul that survives, and the body's going to be destroyed, well then you should let the body do what it feels like; and if it feels good, well then you do it. They handed their bodies over to every conceivable lust that you could imagine.

Over against the hedonists we have the ascetics. They believe the world is evil, the body is evil, and so you must not do anything with the body. Instead you deny the body its passions and appetites, you mutilate the body, you suppress, and you starve.

Should the Corinthian Christians be ascetics or hedonists? Should 21st century Christians take the path of 'ignore' or the route of 'indulgence'? Is it just these two choices, or is there a third way, a better way?

TWO SLOGANS [VERSES 12-14]

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#1: All things are lawful for me (v12).

We do not know if it was Paul who said it when he was among them, or this is a saying that was current among the Corinthians then. Assuming that it was Paul who said it, he said it to emphasize the freedom that Christians enjoy in Christ. But clearly, he cannot mean that Christians are free to sin. His 'all things' cannot include murder and adultery and theft, else he would have contradicted himself when he said earlier in verses 9-11 that those who practiced those sins will not inherit the kingdom of God.

It appears that the Christians in Corinth had taken the words of Paul and applied it in a way that he never intended it to mean. They are saying since Paul

said that all things are lawful, hence I can have sex with anyone I want, and it is ok. That was clearly not what Paul had in mind when he said those words. The truth is that when we face truths that we find it hard to accept, we will often look for room to maneuver. When we want to do something, it is not hard to find some way to justify it.

The apostle will deal with the sexual immorality of the Corinthian Christians soon (verse 15 onwards). Here in verse 12, he would want to clear up the principle of Christian freedom that he has emphasized.

When the matter at hand is not sin, then yes, all things are lawful for me, but I did not put a full-stop after that. Rather, it is a comma, because there are certain boundaries I will say. Here's two:

(i) It must be helpful.

In other words, it must help me as a Christian, and help others also in their Christian life. So the question is not simply "What's wrong with it?" or "Can I do it?" but also "How will it be helpful/beneficial?"

(ii) It must not enslave.

The thing may not be sin, and it may help, but will it end up controlling me? Am I in control of it or is it in control of me? If I don't have it, if I don't do it, what then? Will my response be "I must have it, I must do it, or I will die!" Real freedom is the ability to say 'No' to it.

Can it be called freedom if there are boundaries? Yes! We can see that even in daily life. We have freedom of speech. But that does not mean we can just shout 'Fire!' in a crowded cinema (when there is no fire)! With freedom must come responsibility.

How can we apply this?

#2: Food for the stomach and stomach for food (v13).

Is this something said by Paul? Very unlikely! It appears now likely that it is a popular saying among the Corinthians. The argument goes like this: Why is their food? It's for your stomach. Why do you have a stomach? To be filled with food.

So the same argument applies to sex and body. Sex is for the body and the body is for sex. When you feel hungry, just go and get some food to eat. You don't suppress it. You satisfy it. Similarly, when you feel your sex drive, go look the opposite sex and get it satisfied. It makes as much sense to debate the morality of eating a chocolate bar when you are hungry as to debate the morality of any sex act when you are inclined to engage in.

In dealing with this second slogan, Paul's response is different from the first. In the first, he seeks to clarify and redeem it. Here, he challenges it and refutes it. He says, "No, you are wrong. The body is not for sex. The body is for the Lord. If you want a slogan, here's it!"

Who made your body, Corinthians? God! Who redeemed your body, Corinthian Christians? Christ! Who will resurrect your body, Christians @ Corinth? The Lord! So your body is not for you to do as you please, but for Him to do as He pleases, because He made it, He redeemed it, and He will resurrect it!

Realise that our body will last beyond this life! Our body (resurrected body) will be with us in heaven forever and ever!

How can we apply this?

FOUR ARGUMENTS [VERSES 15-20]

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#1: You Are A Member Of Christ.*Verses 15-17.*

A Christian is a member of the body of Christ. A Christian is joined to Christ. This means you cannot do anything without involving Christ!

When you have sex with another person, you are joined to that person. This is a reference to what is said in Genesis 2:24. Genesis 2:24 talks about a man and a woman joining themselves together in marriage, and they becoming one flesh. In marriage, the two becomes one and this oneness is expressed in their sexual life. This is what God intends - oneness through marriage, sex within marriage only.

By having sexual relations with a harlot, you are joined to that person. Yet as a Christian, you are joined to Christ. Hence, you joined Christ to the harlot! What a horrible, blasphemous thought!! How can it be?

Hence you should never, never be engaged in illicit sex!

#2: You Are Sinning Grievously Against Yourself.*Verse 18.*

This is not saying that sexual immorality is a more serious sin than other sins. But this is saying that this sin has very serious consequences on oneself compared to other sins. It causes deeper harm and leaves deeper scars than we tend to imagine.

Compare sexual immorality with stealing, for example. Just compare the spouse's reaction. For sexual immorality, divorce is always held out as a route to take, but we don't see and hear such a reaction when it is stealing. This reaction tells us that sexual immorality is a sin that unique in its effects. Moreover, the shame, the guilt, the possible medical consequences, the pain it brings on family members and friends, it is just huge!

The devil never tells us the small print. It is utterly senseless to commit sexual immorality.

#3: You Are The Temple Of The Holy Spirit.

Verse 19a.

The 'body' is singular, meaning every Christian is a temple where God dwells. The word 'temple' is naos, which means sacred shrine, the holy place. The message here is that we are bearers of the Holy Spirit. Wherever we go, the Spirit goes, because He is in us. And because I am the Temple of the Holy Spirit, I do not belong to myself, I belong to Him. I am not independent, but what I do "affects" the Holy Spirit. I must never bring anything into my body that is not consistent with who He is!

#4: You Are Not Your Own.

Verses 19b-20.

'You are bought' is put in the tense that conveys a single decisive action in time past. This clearly refers to the Cross. At the Cross, Christ redeemed you, bought you. With a price == His own blood.

Could you now do things that grieve the One who bought Him with His own blood? And how can you do as you like with your body, when that body doesn't belong to you? It belongs to Christ! You have no right to do as you please with your body. To do that is to be guilty of trespassing, guilty of stealing!!

How to apply this?

TWO COMMANDS [VERSES 18, 20]

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#1: *Flee sexual immorality. The tense used indicates a habitual action. Make it your habit to flee everything you meet it. Not just avoid, but flee. Run. Run away. Run away fast. And the mood is imperative, meaning this is a command!*

#2: *Glorify God in your body. Whatever you do with your body or to your body, you must ask yourself: How would people see the glory of God and praise Him? This is a good measure to help us decide what we should do or not do with respect to our body.*

How to apply this?

Is there a sin to confess?

Is there a command to obey?

Is there a practice to re-consider?

Is there a mindset to forsake?

Is there an act you need to do?