

# 1 CORINTHIANS 6.12-20

## Glorify God In Your Body

**Intro:** On the surface, chapter 6 seems to cover two very different issues: the matter of taking brethren to court (vss. 1-11) and the issue of sexual immorality (vss. 12-20). Yet, the two matters are closely connected. First, vss. 9-11 serve as a bridge between the two matters. Their treatment of each other was making them unrighteous again, and thus unfit for the kingdom of God. Certainly that would also be true of fornicating with prostitutes! Second, as we've noted throughout, their pride was a major problem. Pride fueled their divisiveness and their litigious spirit. And pride had led them to believe that fornication wasn't that big of a deal.

Fornication is the subject of this passage. While we will be making application to sexual immorality in general, it is clear from the text that the particular issue in Corinth had to do with prostitution (see vss. 15-16). Such behavior would seem shocking and scandalous to us, but not to those living in the first century, particularly those living in Corinth. First, cultic prostitution was the norm in the city, where Aphrodite's temple housed 1000 temple prostitutes. Visiting these was encouraged so as to curry the favor of the gods, and because the money funded the temple itself. Second, sexual immorality was viewed as normal in Greek/Roman culture. So Cicero said, "If there is anyone who thinks that youth should be forbidden affairs even with courtesans, he is doubtless austere (I cannot deny it), but his view is contrary not only to the licence of this age, but also to the custom and concessions of our ancestors. For when was this not a common practice? When was it blamed? When was it forbidden?" And Plutarch urged wives to not be angry with their cheating husbands: "She should reason that it is respect for her which leads him to share his debauchery, licentiousness, and wantonness with another woman."

With this background, we will note what Paul and more importantly the Lord have to say about sexual immorality.

### VSS. 12-14, COMBATING FALSE PREMISES

1. This section is difficult to interpret, particularly because of the opening phrase, "All things are lawful for me..."
  - » Paul will use the same phrase in 10.23. Was Paul saying that all conduct was lawful, but then amending or clarifying that statement? It would seem doubtful.
  - » I have adopted the conclusion that Paul is citing a Corinthian slogan. In fact, it would seem that vss. 12-13 contain two Corinthian slogans: "All things are lawful for me," and "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food." If you use the ESV or NIV versions, you'll note that those phrases are in quotations, reflecting the translators' belief that Paul was quoting their slogans. But how could the Corinthians have adopted such slogans?
  - » It would seem that they had perverted some of Paul's own teachings. Much of what Paul dealt with was Gentile inclusion in Christ, inclusion without being bound to the Law. In fact, all Christians possess "freedom" in Christ (Galatians 5.1). Such freedom from the Law meant a doing away of the Old Testament food restrictions (see Colossians 2.16-17). So, it would seem that the Corinthians had perverted Paul's teaching regarding freedom, particularly as it relates to food, into a general maxim that the Christian is free in all regards, that all things are lawful.
2. Their reasoning was flawed! There may be freedom in Christ, but to go back into sin is to be mastered by sin! Food and the stomach are meant for each other, but the body is not meant for sexual immorality! Furthermore, food and the stomach are only for this life, but

the body will remain in the next life!

3. “The body cannot be dismissed as unimportant; the body is for the Lord. It is the instrument wherein we serve God. It is the means whereby we glorify God. The Lord for the body shows that just as food is necessary if the stomach is to function, so is the Lord necessary if the body is to function. It is only as God enables us that we can live the kind of life for which we were meant.” (Leon Morris)
4. The resurrection of the body, and not just the preservation of the soul, is a clear teaching (vs. 14). That Jesus’ body actually arose is clear from the gospels. That our bodies will actually arise is equally apparent.
  - » Note that Paul places himself with those who would be raised (see also 2Cor 4:14). However, in 1Thess 4:15 he places himself with the living. Point: he didn’t know when the resurrection would occur.

### **VSS. 15-17, CANNOT BE “ONE” WITH THE LORD AND “ONE” WITH A PROSTITUTE.**

1. A Christian belongs to the Lord, both his soul AND his body. Christianity does not know anything of Greek dualism (the separation of one’s body and spirit). Rather, the Scriptures deal with the whole person. So, if our bodies belong to the Lord, we can’t take them and give them to a prostitute!
2. To further the point, Paul uses the marriage analogy of “one flesh”. While the principle of “one flesh” in Genesis 2.24 speaks to the complete union of husband and wife, when a man engages in fornication with a prostitute he becomes one body with her. However, a Christian has been joined to the Lord (they have become “one spirit”, i.e. man’s spirit remade in the image of His Spirit, see Eph. 4.24; 2Cor. 3.18). Becoming “one spirit” with Christ is a complete union, making the partial union with a prostitute impossible. Or viewed from the negative side, if one gives themselves to a prostitute, what does that say about their union with Christ?

### **VSS. 18-20, YOUR BODY, THE TEMPLE OF GOD**

1. Based on all that has been said, Paul does not mince words: flee immorality! No toying around, no half measures. Get away! All that Paul has said before and what he says after only emphasize the urgency of fleeing sexual immorality.
2. First, the nature of sexual immorality is to sin against one’s body. Given what Paul has already said, it would seem that he is referencing the union we have with the Lord. Since we are “one spirit” with Him, our bodies belong to Him. Many sins affect the body, but fornication takes the body away from the Lord and joins it to another!
3. Second, our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit (note, this would be another way of expressing our becoming “one spirit” with Him, vs. 17). God’s Spirit can only dwell in a holy place, thus we need to keep His dwelling place pure and holy. We must flee sexual immorality.
4. Third, since we are His temple, we do not belong to ourselves, but to Him. And the price He paid for us was great! 1Peter 1.18-19
5. The passage began with a negative, “flee immorality,” but ends with it’s opposite yet equal positive: “therefore glorify God in your body.” One cannot engage in sexual immorality and glorify God at the same time. Only when we appreciate our union with Him and use our bodies for His purposes can we glorify Him.

### **APPLICATION:**

1. **Sober thinking about sexual immorality.** Paul may have been addressing fornicating with a prostitute, but his words ring home in today’s hyper-sexualised culture!
  - » We would do well to remember that “the body is not for immorality.” That humanity has forgotten this was humorously illustrated by CS Lewis: “You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where

you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?"

- » "Sexual immorality is still sin, even though it has been justified under every conceivable rationalization. Those who take Scripture seriously are not prudes or legalists at this point; rather, they recognize that God has purchased us for higher things." (Gordon Fee)
- » "Casual sex' is anything but casual. It is an act of sacrilege. Temples like our bodies are not meant for profanations like this." (Leon Morris)

2. **The body is important.** The Greeks had denigrated the body, saying it was inherently evil. Some Christians have taken similar views, believing in a purity of the spirit that is untainted by the transgressions of the flesh. But you will note the importance this passage puts on the body;

- » The body is for the Lord (vs. 13)
- » The body will be raised (vs. 14)
- » The body is a member of Christ (vss. 15-17)
- » The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (vs. 19)
- » The body was purchased by God (vss. 19-20)
- » The body should be used to glorify God (vs. 20)