

Honor God With Your Body

1 Corinthians 6:1-20

Key Verse: 6:19,20

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

In the Corinthian church there were many problems. Thus far, Paul has dealt with problems of division and sexual immorality. In today's passage he addresses lawsuits between believers, and again deals with sexual immorality in order to bring it to a conclusion. Today we learn how to settle disputes within the church and how to honor God with our bodies. This is so important in our time. There are many, even among Christians, who misuse their bodies. Then, tragedy follows them like a shadow, and they become useless. However, when we use our bodies properly, we can glorify God and live happy, healthy lives. Let's learn how to honor God with our bodies.

I. Why not rather be cheated? (1-11)

Look at verse 1. “If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?” Whenever people live together, there are bound to be disputes. So nations and states have established court systems in which people can sue each other to resolve their disputes. In Corinth, there was a highly developed legal system based on Roman law and lawsuits were common. In early U.S. history, civil lawsuits were somewhat rare; now they are as common as drinking coffee. One famous case of 1994 was

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“Liebeck v. McDonalds Restaurants.” After getting coffee by drive-thru, Ms. Stella Liebeck pulled to a side lane to add cream and sugar. While removing the lid, she spilled it and was burned. Then she sued McDonalds on the grounds that the coffee was too hot and won \$2.86 million. In 2002, civil lawsuits cost the U.S. economy \$233 billion¹. These days we see many advertisements of attorneys who want to recruit injured people and persuade them to sue others. Medical doctors have been hit hard with malpractice lawsuits. They in turn pass the costs to their patients. Sometimes the U.S. seems to have gone crazy with lawsuits.

However, the Christian church should be different—not because Christians never dispute, but because they handle disputes differently. In verse 1, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for taking their disputes to civil courts instead of to the saints. They did this, in part, out of their spiritual ignorance. They did not know that saints are the most qualified judges. Saints learn the mind of Christ and grow in spiritual insight to see things from God’s point of view. Therefore, the judgment of the saints is superior to that of any human court, including the Supreme Court of the United States. When Jesus comes again, he will share his power and glory with the saints, who will help judge the world, and even angels (Mt 19:28; 2 Ti 2:12; Rev 20:4). So, we are competent to judge trivial cases of this age. In this part, we find two principles in settling disputes.

First, raise wise arbiters. In verses 4-5, Paul counsels the Corinthians to appoint judges, or arbiters, from among believers to settle disputes in the church. This does not mean that Christians despise civil courts; instead, we must respect judges as God’s servants who bring justice to the world (Ro 13:4). But when problems arise in the church, they should be settled in the church. So we need wise arbiters.

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Exodus 18:21 gives us good criteria for an arbiter. He must fear God, be trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain. Arbiters must have God's perspective and give objective decisions based on the truth. Then both sides must accept the decision of the arbiter and obey the truth. In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul calls the church, "the pillar and foundation of the truth." Church leaders should create an atmosphere of true justice and righteousness in the church that is far superior to the world. Pastors and elders are responsible to solve all problems that arise in the church in a way that honors Christ and reveals his glory. However, if Christians fight with each other in court in front of unbelievers it dishonors Christ (6).

Second, yield even when wronged or cheated. Let's read verse 7. "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" When Christians fight with each other, who wins? Satan wins. Satan shrieks with sadistic joy and becomes the head cheerleader to stir up more fighting. In this way he wants to destroy the church, and its witness in the world. That is why Paul said that they were completely defeated. Christians must not fight with each other over material things or trivial matters. Paul strongly encouraged them, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" As Christians we must yield, though we are wronged or cheated. This pleases God and leads to God's blessing. When Shepherd Joseph Horvath's father passed away, he was entitled to share the estate equally with his older brother. But his older brother claimed the whole estate should be his. At the time Shepherd Joe had a family to provide for and his brother was single. But he decided to give his brother the entire estate as an act of Christian charity. He lost a huge amount of money. But he grew spiritually in the image of Christ. God blessed him and his family. Now he is a pillar of faith, St.

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Joseph. Jesus promised us, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Mt 5:5). Let’s decide to lose material things and human honor for Christ’s glory and the benefit of Christian brothers. This is the way of true victory, and to grow in the image of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

On the other hand, those who fight with fellow Christians become wicked people. What’s the problem with being a wicked person? Paul clearly warns that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God. The wicked will go to eternal destruction in hell (Rev 21:8). However, some people are deceived, thinking they can live a wicked life and still go to the kingdom of God. Let’s read verses 9b-10. “Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” Let’s note that slanderers and swindlers are included here. They are wicked people who defame others and cheat others for money. Those who continue in wickedness will not inherit the kingdom of God. In verse 11, Paul remind us that we were miserable in the past because of sin. But we were washed, we were sanctified, we were justified in Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. We must remember this grace as brothers and sisters in Christ. Then we can forgive each other and love each other into eternity as members of God’s family.

As we finish this part, we must take a broader perspective. St. Paul was willing to use the civil courts to fulfill the will of God. Once, he identified as a Roman citizen to protect his evangelistic ministry. In Acts 25:11, he appealed to Caesar to carry the gospel to Rome according to God’s will. So we can say that God’s servants are

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justified in using civil courts to protect the work of God or to fulfill God's will in spreading the gospel to the world.

II. A right view of the body as Christians (12-20)

In this part, Paul turns his attention to sexual immorality again, but from a different perspective than in chapter 5. In verse 12, Paul teaches that freedom is a precious gift that must be used properly to be maintained. The Corinthians were fond of saying, "Everything is permissible for me." They thought that they could use their freedom at random. They sound very much like postmodern people who claim that there are no absolute truths—that everything is a matter of personal preference, feelings, and cultural relativism. They say, "No boundaries," and "If it feels good, do it." But this leads to great damage. There are moral absolutes in the world God has made. If one uses his freedom against God's law, the consequence is fatal. If one uses his freedom to sin, he will become a slave again to sin. True freedom can be enjoyed only in the truth (Jn 8:32).

Look at verse 13a. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food." This was another popular saying of the Corinthians. It expressed their thought that eating was a purely physical activity. This revealed their Greek philosophy of gnostic dualism, which claimed that the spirit was good and matter, including the body, was evil. Two schools of thought developed from this premise: Epicureans and Stoics. Epicureans held that since the body was evil anyway, they could indulge in any kind of sinful behavior and it would not affect their spirit. Stoics held that since the body was evil it should be punished by mistreating it in various ways. Both of them were wrong and their influence was damaging. Though the

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Corinthian Christians had accepted Christ, their way of thinking had not been changed. Under the influence of Greek philosophy, they thought that Christ had redeemed their spirits but not their bodies. So they justified indulging their bodies and glorified food. Paul warned that God would destroy them both.

Paul went on to correct the Corinthians' wrong view of the body. Look at verse 13b. "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." When Christ died for our sins, he redeemed not only our spirits, but our bodies as well. Christ redeemed our whole man so that our whole man might belong to him. Christ wants to dwell in our whole being, body, mind and spirit. However, just as man's Fall had a two step process: immediate death to the soul and the beginning of death to the body, so redemption in Christ has a two step process. When we accept Christ, our soul is made alive immediately with everlasting life. The body, however, begins a process of renewal or sanctification. Bad habits and false ways of thinking must be dealt with until we live a holy life in the body.

We can understand this when we remember the Israelites in the time of Exodus. Exodus is the exact portrayal of God's salvation work. Pharaoh symbolizes Satan, who ruthlessly oppresses sinners. The Israelites had no power to get out of bondage, and sinners cannot escape the gravity of sin. However, God provided the way through the blood of the Lamb (Jn 1:29). Yet redemption is just a beginning, not the end. After escaping Egypt, they needed to be disciplined in the wilderness to overcome the bad habits they had learned as slaves. God gave them the law and trained them to live by it. God gave them daily bread, and helped them to get up

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early, dedicate their day to God, and to work hard. The purpose of his redemption was to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

In the same way, we Christians need to overcome our past sinful habits and lifestyle. Our bodies must be sanctified. Our daily lives should be made holy. We should become more like Jesus every day through godly living and divine discipline. Finally, our bodies will be fully sanctified. Verse 14 says, “By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.” Our bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual (1 Co 15:42b-44). There will be no more sinful nature. There will be no more temptation. We will enjoy real freedom in the kingdom of God.

Look at verse 15a. “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?” Christ so indwells his people that our bodies are his members. It is unthinkable to unite the members of Christ with a prostitute. It is like trying to unite God and Satan, or holiness and sin. No human being can handle the strife of such a union; it will tear him apart. Some Corinthians thought that free sex was like eating a good meal. But Paul corrects them in verse 16. Sex is a special God-given gift that produces a mysterious union. One can eat a good meal and forget about it several hours later. However, no one can just forget about a sexual partner. This is why the gift of sex must be used properly. It is given by God for his good purpose, to be enjoyed between husband and wife within the bounds of marriage. It is to consummate their love relationship and, for the purpose of having many children. Christians must have many children—at least six, like Dr. Sohn, Young Lee and me. Then we must raise them as disciples of Christ who can live holy lives of mission for the glory of God. On the other hand, if we misuse the gift of sex, our

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bodies are damaged and our character is distorted. We become totally useless and miserable. So from a young age we must keep our bodies pure. Then we can live happily in God's providence.

Verses 18-20 give us clear direction in how to use our bodies. First, we must flee from sexual immorality. This means we must run away from it as soon as we detect it. If we see a bad image on the computer or television, we must shut it off immediately. If we see a provocative member of the opposite sex, we must run away immediately like Joseph and Augustine. If we hear the enticing words of a promiscuous person we must close our ears and sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy," with a loud voice. Admittedly, it is not easy for young people who are full of hormones and energy to overcome lustful desires. But we must remember that giving in to sexual temptation causes grave damage to oneself.

Second, we must honor God with our bodies. Let's read verses 19-20. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body." Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. God lives in us and wants to use us for his purpose. Therefore, we have great potential to do amazing things in our lifetimes. When we recognize God's presence in us and pray for his guidance, we can find many ways in which we need to develop our bodies to be used for the glory of God. This has led many people to discipline themselves from a young age to be used for a holy purpose. John Wesley was a kind of second generation believer. He was the son of godly parents and the fifteenth of nineteen children. His mother Susanna trained him to work hard, study hard, and live a pure life. From the time he could walk and talk, she taught him to

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read. Later, at Oxford, he formed a holy club with George Whitefield and others to train themselves for God's use. When he prepared himself in this way, he was used greatly by God to spread the gospel to the world in the 18th century and to found the Methodist Church.

2 Timothy 2:20-22 says, "In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." When we offer ourselves to God with a pure heart he will use us for the most noble purpose. Therefore, let's offer our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. Let's offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

Practically, how can we honor God with our bodies? Here "body" does not mean physical body only, but includes the whole man: spirit, mind and physical body. We must discipline our physical bodies by eating proper food—not junk food—and sleeping regularly—not staying up too late to watch television—and by getting enough exercise by playing tennis or soccer and working out at the YMCA. They say that a sound body is the vessel of a sound mind. We must discipline our minds by doing our homework perfectly and on time, and by reading classic books and watching classic movies. We must develop our talents for poetry, speech, music, and so on, until we become world famous, like Wendy Warner. Furthermore, we must develop our spirituality by reading the Scriptures, devoting time to prayer, memorizing the word of God, and reading good Christian books and watching

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good Christian movies, like the Chronicles of Narnia. When we do so we can be happy and healthy and render glory to God. Let's pray that we may have a right attitude toward our bodies and use them properly and in this way honor God with our bodies.