

GOD AND YOUR BODY

I Corinthians 6:9-20

Series: Old Testament Character Studies

By David H. Roper

We need at all times a very public proclamation of the biblical view of sex. Without doubt sex is the most widespread problem that young people encounter. It is not dope, it is not political radicalism, rife as these may be. The major problem is sex. As a matter of fact I have come to the conclusion that if you are a young person and you have no problems at all in this area then you probably really have a problem!

One reason there is so much confusion about sex is that we are being bombarded on every side by the prophets of this age--through X-rated movies, and hard-core pornography, and through the "playboy" philosophy--encouraging every conceivable and sometimes inconceivable form of sexual perversion. One young person, reflecting this attitude, wrote:

The younger generation is doing what their parents have told them not to do, and they are finding that premarital sexual relations are fun, healthy, and normal. The old idea that virtue involves premarital virginity has vanished from the scene and it has been a beneficial advance for everyone involved.

You don't have to do much reading and listening to hear pronouncements like these: "Our moral rules are based on an outmoded view of life." "The Victorian rules about sex are obsolete and should be scrapped." "An earlier age proclaimed that the sexual drive was evil and should be repressed; but today we know that sex is normal, exciting, and fun." Now if you think that this is simply the opinion of the world and that our Christian young people today have not been influenced by that thinking, then you are not listening to our young people. They need, and we as parents need, a biblical word on this subject. It is not enough to say, "Don't do it," because they are asking, "Why?" We need to understand from the Scriptures why premarital sex is wrong so that we can give adequate answers to their questions.

The Scriptures have a great deal to say about this subject. They are very frank and very honest. God is not a prude. The most beautiful and expressive love song ever written is the Song of Solomon, which is a very frank discussion of physical love. God conceived the idea of sex--it wasn't Hugh Hefner. God is therefore the authority on the subject.

Before we turn to our major passage in 1 Corinthians 6, I would like to make two general observations. In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul writes these words:

This is the will of God as it pertains to your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality and that you know how to possess your own vessel in honor...

The term "vessel" refers to our bodies, although the Revised Standard Version interprets it as a reference to a wife. We must learn to discipline our bodies and abstain from sexual immorality. This, Paul says, is a part of God's plan to sanctify us. Now the word "sanctification" means to put someone to their intended purpose. It is God's purpose that you become a being filled and flooded with God, expressing the character and beauty of the life of Jesus Christ in the world, making visible the invisible Christ. This is his purpose for you. Paul declares that we can never realize that purpose until we once and for all deal with sexual immorality in our lives--the lustful thoughts as well as the more overt manifestations. We can never be what God intends us to be until we deal with this area of our lives.

I am coming to believe that very often this is the last stronghold of the flesh. I speak to college students on this theme quite often and I find that every time I do it evokes fantastic hostility. Even people who are convinced of the authority of the Scriptures go right up the wall when you start speaking about the lordship of Christ in their sex life. They somehow feel that this is an area that is untouchable, private, belonging solely to them, and that God does not have the right to invade it. But until God deals with this issue we can never know a life of freedom and power and authority. Another thing I would like to say by way of a general observation is that the Bible not only says a great deal about sexual *immorality*, but it also says a great deal about sexual *morality*. Sex in itself is not immoral. God's plan for sex is that it accomplish a God-given purpose in marriage. There are three reasons given in the Scriptures for sex within a marriage

thought.

First of all, God has given sex to us for the purpose of procreation. It is the means by which we enter into a creative act with God and produce a life. Those of us who have had that experience know what a great thing it is. And it is proper, God says, only within the context of marriage. I don't know of anyone who seriously advocates bringing children into the world apart from a marriage relationship and the security that a home can provide.

Secondly, sex is illustrative. It is intended to be an illustration of the relationship between Christ and his church. Paul says so in Ephesians 5. "The two shall become one. This is a great mystery, but I believe," Paul says, "this refers to Christ and his church." Sex is intended to be an illustration of the union of two spirits; the Spirit of Jesus Christ and the spirit of man. And again, this illustration is meaningful only within the context of marriage. It is not Christ and his *lover*; it is Christ and his *bride* we illustrate.

Thirdly, sex is designed to be unitive. It is the means by which two become one. It is expressive of the deep personal love that we have for one another, and within marriage it is a beautiful expression of that love. Outside of marriage it is not unitive. It tends to cause preoccupation with the physical part of the relationship and to disintegrate and destroy the relationship that is there. You cannot avoid the fact that the Scriptures teach that sex is right and proper and holy, but only within the confines of a marriage relationship. You may rebel against that restriction, but you cannot deny the fact that it is what the Word of God teaches. And as Christians we have to place ourselves under the authority of Jesus' words.

Now while you turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6, I will give you some background to this passage. Corinth was a city very much like San Francisco and the Bay Area. It was a seaport, the major metropolitan area of the Roman province of Achaia. It was a very heavily populated, cosmopolitan city and was very sophisticated. The most imposing building in Corinth was the temple dedicated to Venus, the Roman goddess of love, the counterpart to the Greek goddess Aphrodite. There were about a thousand temple prostitutes serving this temple. The people in Corinth worshipped sex; every type of illicit sexual relationship took place there. And it was known for kinky sex. In fact, the Greeks coined a word to describe anyone who was given over to sexual excess: he was "corinthianized."

The problem was that the thinking of the city had pervaded the church. The church is supposed to challenge and correct the world but just the reverse had taken place and all sorts of sexual problems had entered the church. It became necessary for Paul to write this letter to call their attention to the fact that they were condoning what God condemns. Verse 9:

Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived...

= That is a good word, because today we are being deceived by so-called prophets, both within the church and outside it. Men like Bishop John Robinson, Harvey Cox, Hugh Hefner, and others are saying that the biblical view of sex is antiquated, that there is a new morality today. But they are deceivers, and the end product of their words is the destruction of young men and young women through the loss of their manhood and womanhood. Paul says, "Don't be deceived. Listen to what God has to say, not to what the prophets of this age are saying, because God loves you and wants to spare you. He is not a divine wet blanket, doggedly determined to deprive you of joy and to make your life miserable. Don't be deceived. God loves you enough to tell you the truth about this area of your life,"

..neither fornicators, nor idolaters [because idolatry and sex were very closely linked in Corinth], **nor adulterers, nor effeminate** [the Greek word means "soft," and refers to boys and young men who allowed themselves to be used homosexually], **nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.**

Paul's emphasis here is that a person of this stripe could not inherit the kingdom of *God*. The emphasis is very clear in the Greek. They may inherit the kingdom of men and as a matter of fact they were doing just that in Corinth. Nero, the emperor at this time, had recently married a boy. So this sort of activity was rampant throughout the empire. Paul says this type of man might inherit the world, but he will never inherit the kingdom of God.

Those are frightening words. Is he saying that Christians who fall into sins of this nature will be disinherited? No, he is not. There is always provision for forgiveness if we will judge the sin. Any Christian at any time can fall into any one of these sins. But no matter how badly we may have fallen if we judge the sin and turn to the Lord and claim his forgiveness we are cleansed.

Paul is referring to the person who can continue in rebellion without judging his sin and without any sense of remorse or need to repent. That type of person is not a member of God's family. He doesn't have God's life, because God's life will not allow him to live with unjudged sin. If we can act this way and condone the sin and justify it and defend it, that is an indication we don't belong to God's family. If we do belong to God's family our character will be different. Notice what Paul says next:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

This is the way you used to act, but not any longer. You may fall into sexual sins, but that is not your character and you cannot live in them any longer. I will never forget the time about ten years ago when I first came to Peninsula Bible Church. Ray Stedman was preaching on this passage, and when he came to this verse he asked the congregation, "How many of you seated here this morning were characterized by these sins before you came to Jesus Christ?" And all over the congregation people stood up. One young man who is now a pastor was there. At that time he wasn't a Christian. He looked around at all the people standing and said to himself, "These are my kind of people!"

Many of us can respond to that. That was our character. We were like that, but we are different today. We are not like that anymore. We've been washed, we've been sanctified, we've been justified, we have Jesus Christ's righteousness, and his life. We cannot any longer defend the old life. We have to judge it and put it away if we are truly members of God's family.

Verse 12 is interesting:

Many things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. Many things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything.

This was evidently a contemporary saying in Corinth: "All things are lawful for me." Perhaps it should be put in quotation marks to set it off from the rest of the verse. Paul is quoting a philosophy current in Corinth which is very contemporary today. "All things are lawful for me," (i.e., "I'm the judge of what is right and what is wrong. There are no absolutes; there's nothing objective to govern my conduct; I can live as I please.") Now Paul says that there is a measure of truth in that philosophy. He doesn't contradict the statement entirely. All things *are* lawful for me. Everything that God has created is good. In another context, 1 Timothy 4, Paul writes,

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving: for then it is sanctified [i.e., put to its intended purpose by the word of God and prayer].

Paul is saying that everything God has given to us is good. There is nothing basically evil. Satan doesn't create evil. He can't create anything. He takes the good things that God creates and distorts them and twists them. But everything that God creates is good. The problem is that we need to learn how to put it to its intended purpose. It is by prayer and the study of the word of God that we can do that. Sex is good, it is something that God created, but it has to be governed by certain guidelines. So Paul says, "I will not do anything that is not profitable, that does not build me up, and move me on to maturity in Christ. And furthermore, even though a thing might be lawful for me, I am not going to allow anything to enslave me. I'll not be brought under the authority of anything, and that includes my sex life. I will allow Jesus Christ to govern that part of my life and to determine how it is to be used. I'll follow his directives in this regard."

Then Paul quotes another contemporary saying:

Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord but will also raise us up through his power.

"Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food"--another contemporary saying in Corinth. They were saying that nature demands satisfaction. If you're hungry, you go buy a hamburger. That is a perfectly legitimate position. But you cannot infer from it that because you have a sexual drive you must immediately fulfill it. Because both food and the stomach are temporary, but the body is not. The body is not for immorality. God has a higher purpose for it. "The body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body." Just as a perfect body was created for Jesus Christ and became an instrument through which he displayed the character of the Father, so a body is given to us to be used not as a plaything, not as an object for self-gratification, but as an eternal instrument through which we can declare the glory of Jesus Christ.

The Greeks' concept of the body was that it was essentially evil. The soul was good, the body was evil. The body was the prisonhouse of the soul. This thinking led them into two extremes. They practiced either asceticism, buffeting and neglecting the body, or total licentiousness. They felt that since the body was of low esteem it could be used in any way without affecting the inner man.

But Paul declares that the truth is quite the contrary. He says, "No!" Christians are not 'antibodies'; we believe that the body is good. It is an instrument through which we can manifest the character of God. It is not a toy, not a plaything, not something we use simply to indulge ourselves; it is for the Lord. And not only now, but throughout all eternity. The same God who raised up Jesus and gave him his redeemed body is going to raise us up some day and throughout all eternity our bodies will be used to manifest the character of God."

"The body is not for immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body." This is the first of three statements that Paul makes in this passage about the uniqueness of the body. In verse 13 he says, "The body is for the Lord"; in verse 15 he says, "Your bodies are members of Christ"; and in verse 19, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." Now let's look at the second statement:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For, He says, "The two will become one flesh" but the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him.

Do you understand what he is saying? When we become Christians we are joined in spirit with Jesus Christ. He comes to live in the spirit of man. And because, Paul says, the body is so closely united with the spirit, whatever we do with our body implicates the Spirit of Jesus Christ who lives within us. The two cannot be separated. What you do with your body involves your Lord who lives in your spirit. So if you go to an X-rated movie you take your Lord along. Or if you are involved in an immoral sexual relationship Christ is implicated in it. Whatever you expose your body to, the Lord is exposed to. So Paul says, "May it never be that you take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot!"

Now let's look at the third purpose for the body:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

God doesn't despise your body; quite the contrary. It is a holy thing. What's more, it is a temple for the Spirit of God. He has bought you out at the cost of his life. He has taken up residence in your life. Your body is no longer yours to use as you see fit; it is a temple for the Spirit of God. I do not believe that any young person or adult who grasps the majesty of that statement is going to be caught groveling around in the back seat of some car. I just don't believe it. Our bodies are the temple of the living God!

Now I purposely passed over verse 18 because I believe this is the key to the whole passage in terms of gaining victory in this area of our life. We are being flooded on every hand by stimuli and impulses to sexual immorality. Where is the way out?

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body.

I must confess that although I have studied this passage many times I still do not fully understand verse 18. I take it by faith. Paul says that every other sin is outside the body: but sexual sins are uniquely sins against the body. I think it is because in sexual sin we prostitute our bodies by using them for a purpose other than that for which they were intended. So such sin defiles the body in a way that no other sins can. "Therefore," Paul says, "Flee immorality." Upon occasion that may actually mean physical flight, as it did in the case of Joseph who literally had to give the empty sleeve to Potipher's wife. But almost always, in our experience, it primarily involves mental flight. In Matthew 5:28-30 we see the Lord's helpful words in this regard:

You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery; but I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

I must confess that then I first heard those words they devastated me because I realized that I was guilty of adultery. And yet I felt, "How unfair of the Lord to impose yet another restriction on our sexual behavior--that of the thought life, which is so difficult to control." But I don't think that is the Lord's intent at all. He is not imposing a heavier burden upon

us. He is saying that the secret to dealing with our actions is to deal with our thoughts. That is where sin begins--in the thought life. If you deal with sin in the realm of the thoughts the actions will take care of themselves.

Here is a concept that we ought to understand: thoughts become meditation or contemplation, and that in turn becomes determination to do the thing you're thinking about. Determination becomes action, which becomes memory, which triggers the thoughts again.

The only way to break that cycle is to put away the thought immediately. The thought itself is not sin. It is simply a temptation to sin. And if we will stop at that point, turn from it, lay hold of Jesus Christ and allow him to place that thought under his authority, he will eradicate that thought from our mind, and the actions will take care of themselves. That is where the battle is fought and won--in the realm of the thoughts. Jesus goes on to say,

"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish than for your whole body to go into hell."

Down through history there have been men who have taken these words literally, but I don't believe that is the Lord's intent at all. He is saying that we need to deal with the stimuli that cause us to think lustful thoughts. What are they? Well, they are inputs through the two senses of sight and touch--what you see, and what you put your hands on. Stimuli through these two senses adversely affect our thought life. Jesus said we have to deal very harshly with ourselves. If your eye offends you, pluck it out. If your hand offends you, cut it off.

You cannot tell me that you can read *Playboy* magazine and keep your mind pure. There is just no way! You cannot tell me that you can expose your mind to all the garbage that is available to us today and still be God's man in the world. You can't, and I can't either. Jesus is saying that if we are going to deal with these thoughts and are going to be God's men and God's women in the world today then we must deal with the inputs that stimulate the thoughts, however radical the procedure might be.

Now Paul says this final word:

You have been bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.

The Lord wants you to take your body and make it available to him to be his instrument in the world. He wants it to be a body that is pure and that expresses in every way the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is his intent for you. Now, I know that there are many of you here who have patterns of failure in the past. You have tried and fallen, and tried and fallen again, but you want your life to be what God intends it to be.

I want to share with you an incident from the gospel. It is found in John 8 and I'm sure it is familiar to you. It is the story of the woman caught in adultery. I have a vivid imagination, and I can imagine what this scene must have been like. The Pharisees had caught this woman in the very act of adultery and, as is so often the case, the man escaped. They dragged this poor woman into Jesus' presence and you can imagine what she must have looked like and how she must have felt.

They said to Jesus, "We caught this woman in the very act of adultery. Moses said we should stone her [and they were right]; what do you say?" Jesus didn't say anything. He knelt in the dust and with his finger he wrote on the ground. We don't know what he wrote, perhaps the seventh commandment: "Thou shall not commit adultery." Then he stood and looked at the people around him and said, "He who is without the sin [literally], let him cast the first stone." What sin? The sin of adultery. Oh, these men hadn't been guilty, perhaps, of the overt sin of adultery with this woman, but many, many times they had thought about it in their minds and they knew it. So his words pierced them like an arrow.

And John writes, "Beginning with the eldest down to the youngest, they went away." Finally Jesus was there alone with the woman and he said to her, "Where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord" and he said, "Neither do I condemn you." The only One who had the right to condemn her, the only Man who never entertained a lustful thought said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more." And he set her free."

So may I say that if you are here this morning in the position of that woman caught in adultery, and if you are willing to say, "Lord," to Jesus Christ, he will set you free. And you can go with the promise that Jesus gave to this woman, "Go, and sin no more."

How wonderful, Lord, that we have a gracious, forgiving God like you, who understands our hearts, who knows our weaknesses, and yet who is our strength. What a privilege to cast every care upon you, and to discover you to be the adequate One. We thank you, in Jesus' name, Amen.

ADDENDUM

Students often ask me the question, "How far should we go?" by which they mean, "What are the physical limits for expressing our affection for one another?" While the Scriptures do forbid pre-marital and extra-marital sexual intercourse, they do not give definite guidelines in every area of sex. Therefore, I cannot be dogmatic, but I usually draw the following diagram for their consideration. I draw the lines where I do based upon my convictions. This is not a law that I would impose upon anyone, but solely a suggestion to help them establish their own limits based upon the principles of the Word of God.

LINE OF EROTIC ACTIVITY

FRIENDSHIP	* ENGAGEMENT	MARRIAGE
h e	k E	K P SI

Symbols

- h = holding hands
- e = brief embrace
- k = kiss
- E = lengthy embrace
- K= protracted kiss
- P = petting (fondling the sex organs)
- SI = sexual intercourse

* Note 1 Timothy 5:2. "Treat the younger women as sisters in all purity." How do you express your affection physically for your sister? What are the physical limits in that relationship?
 There are other recurring arguments with regard to the biblical view of sex.

1. "But sexual exploration is necessary to determine compatibility." This statement is a cross between sheer speculation and wishful thinking. There is no evidence that premarital sexual experience makes for a happy marriage. In fact, if Kinsey's Report has validity at all, it indicates that the majority of divorced people had engaged in premarital sex.
2. "Everyone is doing it." What does that have to do with anything? That argument ought to fall by its own dead weight. Christ came into our lives to set us free from that sort of social pressure. Christians live their lives on the basis of biblical conviction, not social consensus.
3. "The availability of the pill makes possible premarital sex without fear of conception." But technological advances have nothing to do with moral absolutes. Are we free to murder because we have such advanced weapons?
4. "We are in love and already committed to one another. We need to demonstrate our love physically." But sex outside marriage does not cause a love relationship to deepen. In fact it tends to cause it to deteriorate. One tends to get preoccupied with physical love and neglect the deeper, personal, spiritual aspects of the love relationship. Abstinence is the dynamic that holds a couple together while they explore one another's personalities. (If you'll pardon the pun, abstinence makes the heart grow fonder!)

Will you also consider this fact? The above argument for premarital sexual experience is almost always advanced by the male member of the relationship. Woman intuitively know that sexual intercourse is a total act involving their body, soul, and Spirit. They give away something that is irretrievable. Where there is total giving with total commitment there is no loss. But outside marriage there will not be total commitment. Consequently, extra-marital sex inevitably creates terrible anxiety and insecurity in a woman.

5. "But we have already made the step toward total commitment in our minds. We have exchanged vows. We feel we are married now. Why must we wait for a ceremonial and public proclamation before expressing our love sexually?"

Let me quote from a paper written by Jack Crabtree, a Stanford University student:

PRE-CEREMONIAL SEX--Considerations:

1. The question is normally formulated so as to put the burden of proof on those who advocate restraint in the area of preceremonial sex, i.e., "Why shouldn't we go ahead and have sex before the wedding--we are going to be married and we love each other?" But the question which should be asked is, "Why should you have sex before the wedding?" I can think of only one answer which I consider a satisfactory answer to this question, namely, "Because I don't want to restrain myself any longer. I want to give in to my physical desires." Though this is a satisfactory answer to the question, it is hardly the proper attitude to take from the Christian perspective. "For this is the will of God, ...that each of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God." (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 RSV) One must remember that as his love relationship with the girl (or the boy) has been developing, he has had to show restraint in order to discover the depths of her (or his) identity. Why should this restraint not last a little longer until the commitments have been finalized in a ceremony designed to reflect the holiness of the commitment and to bestow honor on the girl who is to be your wife?

2. The final expression of the commitment one lover has for the other is such a sacred thing and such a beautiful thing that it seems aesthetically to demand some kind of ceremony. It seems to demand a medium by which others can witness the beauty and the holiness of the final commitment. To say that this final commitment can come in the privacy of the lovers' minds as they sit at the doorstep of their bedroom is like saying that a song can be created but never be sung. It is true, one can create a song but never let others share in it by listening; but when this is so, the song loses all value except for the selfish enjoyment of the creator of the song. Similarly, the holy commitment to marriage can be 'created' without others ever sharing in the joy generated by the announcement of that commitment, but the finalized commitment loses all value when it is kept silently and selfishly between the lovers. So, since it seems only right that sex should come only after the finalizing of two people's commitment, and since a commitment of value can only be made final through a sharing with others of the expression of that commitment, then it would seem that for reasons of aesthetics one would want to wait until after some kind of ceremony (not necessarily traditional, since traditional ceremonies can be a real drag) before he entangled himself in sex with his partner.

3. For the reasons given above and because a ceremony is a public pronouncement, the ceremony carries with it a sense of finality to the relationship which nothing else could give. In a wedding ceremony the two are announcing to the world that they are going to commit their lives to one another (for better or for worse) from this time forward. Though this commitment itself is not perfected and made final until the initial sexual union itself (so I believe anyway), nevertheless, the public ceremony is the final irreversible expression of the intention to join in this kind of commitment. When two people precede this final expression of their intention toward commitment with sexual intercourse, then there is always the danger that doubt will be cast on their mutual trust. For example, the girl might think: "I was not yet formally and finally bound to him by a vow of commitment, and, therefore, I was no different in that respect than any other girl when we went to bed together. How can I know, then, that he reserves sex for our special relationship only?" It will be argued that if two people love one another they will trust each other completely so that there will be no danger of this mistrust; but even though this is true for the most part, it is a very unrealistic view of love and trust to think that it can never be shaken by circumstances. Love and trust must always entail a kind of anxiety and fear, a fear that we will not please the one we love. Trust must be earned moment by moment by our actions.

4. Since Christians are to be subject to the governing authorities (and since there is no problem in interpreting this as it applies to our present marriage laws), then Christians, insofar as laws indicate a legal course of action with respect to sex and marriage, should obey those laws. (Romans 13)

You are not your own; you were bought with a price.

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