

Our Bodies Belong to God

Devotional Reading: Psalm 139:13–24

Background Scripture: Romans 12:1–21; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

¹² “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.



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Key Text

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; —1 Corinthians 6:19

Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings

Unit 3: Christians and Sacrifice

Lessons 10–14

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the reason why Paul's original readers were to honor God with their bodies.
2. Explain why it's better to view Paul's conclusions as guiding principles rather than direct imperatives.
3. Suggest ways to apply the principles Paul states to a modern situation that didn't exist in Paul's day.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Bodies Joined and Torn
- B. Lesson Context
- I. **Consecrated Bodies (1 Corinthians 6:12–16)**
 - A. Controlling (vv. 12–14)
Health with a Purpose
 - B. Restricting (vv. 15–16)
- II. **Consecrated Spirits (1 Corinthians 6:17–20)**
 - A. Connection with the Lord (vv. 17–18)
 - B. Temple of the Spirit (vv. 19–20)

Conclusion

- A. We Belong to God
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Corinth	<i>Kor-inth.</i>
Corinthians	<i>Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).</i>
Ephesians	<i>Ee-fee-zhunz.</i>
Galatians	<i>Guh-lay-shunz.</i>

Introduction

A. Bodies Joined and Torn

My best friend from the first day of high school was Tony. We shared a vibrant faith. We led Bible studies together and even started a band. His father was the minister of a large church in our area and a highly respected member of the community.

The summer before our senior year, Tony's personality began to shift. He became sullen and isolated. He abruptly quit the band, stopped attending our Bible studies, and didn't return my calls. After weeks of being avoided, I drove to his house. His father answered the door. A woman stood next to him, with her hand on his shoulder. She was not Tony's mother. I was told that Tony was staying with his mother. Tony's dad quickly gave me the address and shut the door.

I went to the apartment building where Tony, his mother, and his siblings had moved. Tony answered my knock on the door. When he saw me, he burst into tears and threw himself into my arms. I held him as he cried. We sat at the kitchen table, and he told me everything. His father had met another woman online, invited her to live with him, and asked for a divorce from Tony's mother. The children had sided with their mother, so their father told them all to leave.

For momentary pleasures, this man had destroyed his marriage,

ruined his relationship with his children, and lost the goodwill of his church and the wider community. Though joined to his wife as one flesh, he had torn them apart.

B. Lesson Context

We're now in our second lesson from 1 Corinthians, so the Lesson Context from last week's study also applies here. The difference is that today's lesson deals with the touchy subject of sexual immorality. For proper context, we need to be aware of how the standards of morality in the Greco-Roman culture of the first century AD differed from those of today.

One such difference was in how prostitution was viewed. In most cities today, prostitution is seen as illegal. However, the culture of the Mediterranean world of the first century did not see it this way. Expectations regarding marital fidelity were more for the wife than the husband—a double standard. Public parties might include prostitutes to entertain the men after the wives were excused from the banquet. The majority culture of the day considered this behavior acceptable.

Shockingly, some members of the church at Corinth were engaging in illicit sexual activity that even the pagan Gentiles disapproved of ([1 Corinthians 5:1](#))! Paul would not stand for this, for he saw sexual sin as a threat to the unity and purity of the entire body of Christ. By contrast, Paul taught a different view of what constituted sexual immorality—today's lesson.

I. Consecrated Bodies ([1 Corinthians 6:12–16](#))

A. Controlling (vv. 12–14)

12a. “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial.

Readers have long puzzled over the coherence of some of Paul’s claims, such as we see here. How could he claim that *I have the right to do anything*, including (by implication) sexual immorality? (The fact that Paul addresses this immorality becomes apparent as the text progresses.)

To resolve this tension, many commentators have concluded that Paul was quoting back to the Corinthians a slogan that they were using to justify their actions, hence the use of quotation marks in the verse before us. This makes sense, as the quotation served to set up his corrective response. New Testament scholar Jay Smith proposes several telltale indicators that a slogan is in view, and we can summarize four of them here. Slogans (1) are brief, pithy statements usually in the present tense, (2) are often repeated, (3) feature wording that is inconsistent with the way Paul usually writes, and (4) are followed by a counterpoint. There are three such possibilities in our lesson text of [1 Corinthians 6:12–20](#), and this is the first.

In this reading, Paul offers two reasons why certain acts do not lie within the Corinthians’ freedom. First, not all behaviors are *beneficial*. Considering all points lead us to contemplate whether something is advantageous or not. To sin is never to our advantage.



Visual for [Lesson 10 & 11](#). Display this visual as you discuss the people and places of the third unit of the quarter.

12b. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

Some behaviors can enslave a person as he or she is *mastered* its power. This is particularly the case with sexual desires, which Jew and Gentile alike understood as involving powerful emotions that could overwhelm reason and subvert one’s self-control. Paul addresses the addictive, enslaving power of sin more fully in [Romans 6:16–7:6](#).

Passages such as [Galatians 2:15–16](#) indicate that the slogan *I have the right to do anything*, now quoted a second time, may have had its roots in

the teachings of Paul himself as he has proclaimed freedom in Christ. But apparently, some had distorted Paul’s teaching to mean something arrogant like, “I can do anything I want to do, and no one has a right to criticize me” (compare [Romans 6:1–4](#)).

What Do You Think?

What can you do to improve your wisdom regarding “the gray areas” of personal conduct?

Digging Deeper

Is it possible for certain behaviors to be “OK” for some people but not for others? Why, or why not?

13a. You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food,

This half-verse seems to introduce another Corinthian slogan. In this reading, the Corinthians used “an argument from analogy.” That kind of reasoning often goes something like this: “As *A* is to *B*, so also *X* is to *Y*.” If that is the case here, then the Corinthians were equating the behavior of satisfying sexual urges with the behavior of eating to satisfy cravings of *the stomach*.

What Do You Think?

What cherished slogans do you need to reevaluate?

Digging Deeper

In what circumstances, if any, are slogans helpful? Why?

13b. “and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

The analogy the Corinthians seemed to have been using overlooks

the bigger picture. God designed our bodies to function as he intends. Food and stomach were indeed designed to work together, but not so regarding *the body* and *sexual immorality*. On the contrary, the body is meant *for the Lord, and the Lord for the body*. In other words, God intended our bodies for union with Christ, not for union in sexually immoral acts.

Health with a Purpose

Pouring my attention 100 percent into academics gained me college degrees and desk jobs. Those, in turn, left my body out of shape, lethargic, and prematurely aged. I knew what to do about it, living in a culture swamped with diet and exercise information. The problem was mustering the motivation.

That motivation asserted itself when I discovered a new passion: Brazilian jiu-jitsu. A martial art that's half judo, half wrestling, jiu-jitsu requires chess-like strategy more than physical brawn. It relieved stress, built my confidence, and expanded my social network, not to mention helped me lose 42 pounds in a year!

We know fully what we “ought” to do in the sight of God and how it is all for our benefit. In a moment of temptation, it can be challenging to be self-controlled. What if the key is not white-knuckled willpower to not do something, but rather a drive to remove every obstacle from doing something we love more?

—A. W.

14. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

We surrender our bodies and all their desires to the Lord's service,

and he commits himself to us. The fulfillment of the latter is seen in resurrection: Christ's human body was *raised* from death by *God*, and our bodies will likewise be raised. Resurrection was being denied by some in Corinth, but Paul saves his fuller discussion on that error for later ([1 Corinthians 15](#)).

B. Restricting (vv. 15–16)

15. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never!

This verse features the first of 16 times that Paul uses the word translated *members* in this letter. For Paul and his readers, this word refers to body parts, such as arms, legs, hands, and ears (compare [1 Corinthians 12:12–27](#)). Paul is fond of picturing the church in terms of diverse human body parts with Christ as its head ([Ephesians 1:22–23](#); [4:15](#)). Use of this metaphor flows from Paul's points about the believer's union with Christ in the two verses just studied. Since the believer is united with Christ, he or she is part of Christ's body.

Having made this point, Paul follows up with a second rhetorical question: Is it permissible to take parts of Christ's body and join them to a *prostitute*? *Never!*

16. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”

Sexual unions outside of marriage, whether paid or unpaid, make the participants *one in body*, in violation of [Genesis 2:24](#). That passage describes the marital union as making male and female “one flesh” (-

compare [Matthew 19:5](#)). Sexual intimacy outside of marriage creates an additional case of *one flesh*. For the married, the result is to bring an additional person into the marriage. This is destructive to God’s intent for the family unit. Things we do with our physical bodies will affect the body that is the church, a body to which we belong as members.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways that married couples can witness God’s “one flesh” intent to an immoral culture?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture passages inform your response?

II. Consecrated Spirits

([1 Corinthians 6:17–20](#))

A. Connection with the Lord (vv. [17–18](#))

17. But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Paul again emphasizes the believer’s union with Christ. Referring to *one ... in spirit* may be puzzling because the word *spirit* can take different meanings depending on context. In some cases, the word might refer to the Holy Spirit. In other cases, it refers to that part of a person that lives on after physical death. In other cases, it refers to a mental disposition.

The key is context. Having just condemned improper intimacy, Paul now contrasts it with an image of a proper relationship: spiritual intimacy *with the Lord* (compare [John 17:20–23](#)). The implication here is that sexual immorality not only works against a marriage, but it also works against one’s relationship with God. The brief moments of physical pleasure that an immoral act brings are trifling compared to the last-

ing damage it causes. It is not possible to separate sexual behavior from a relationship with the Lord. This spiritual dimension must be the controlling factor.

Another viewpoint is that Paul is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby through the “one Spirit,” the believer’s spirit has been joined indissolubly with Christ. Under this idea, Paul is not comparing spiritual union with physical union. Instead, the focus is on the Holy Spirit, who has united the believer to Christ. Thus, one has no right to unite with another in an immoral way.

18. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.

The final piece of Paul’s argument begins with the succinct command to *flee from sexual immorality*. Paul then uses candid language (again) to justify this strong warning as he puts sexual sin in a unique category of wrongdoing. Other *sins* are *outside the body*, meaning they are external. For example, stealing may use the hands to accomplish the sin, but it is still “outside.” Sexual sin, by contrast, is *against* the body because of the intimate union between those engaged in it.

B. Temple of the Spirit (vv. 19–20)

19. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

Paul here draws upon imagery familiar from earlier in the letter: the body as the Spirit’s temple. Paul previously used this image to describe the entire community. This verse reinforces that Christians are collectively God’s temple on earth (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; compare 2 Corin-

ans 6:16). *The Holy Spirit* dwells in each follower of Jesus as a gift from God. The presence of the Spirit also signals God's ownership of that person with the result that *you are not your own*.

The Spirit inhabits the church corporately and each believer individually (Romans 8:9–11). Once this is understood, then one can grasp why engaging with a prostitute is starkly inconsistent with the Christian life. How can a vessel of the Holy Spirit take part in such an unholy act? Such activity is not merely one of illicit physical pleasure. It is also an act of temple desecration.

20a. you were bought at a price.

For Paul's original readers, this word picture calls to mind the slave markets of cities such as ancient Corinth. Everyone in the Corinthian church knew of such places. Some may have suffered this dehumanizing experience personally. Some may have been slave owners, perhaps struggling to reconcile that fact with their new identity as Christians. For Paul's initial audience, the phrase *bought at a price* would have been interpreted as the cost of a ransom to liberate a slave, with the redemption price being the blood of Christ (see Hebrews 9:12; compare Exodus 6:6; Isaiah 43:1; Luke 1:68).

Paul is not explicit about the nature and amount of the price paid (compare Revelation 5:9). Instead, he focuses on the fact that ownership has been transferred (compare 1 Corinthians 7:23).

20b. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Paul concludes with an exhortation. The transfer of ownership obligates believers to *honor God* with their spirits and *bodies* in every way. To honor God with one's spirit but not with one's body is hypocrisy.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways we can glorify God with our bodies in the midst of culture's challenges?

Digging Deeper

How do we improve our ability to recognize those challenges when they come?

Conclusion

A. We Belong to God

Here's the conclusion to the story we opened the lesson with. My friend Tony did not speak to his father for five years. Tony went on to college, played on a Division III basketball team, and met his future wife. He avoided thinking or talking about his dad.

Then, one day, his dad called him and asked to meet for lunch. When they met, Tony refused to hug his father or even shake his hand. As they sat at the table, Tony prepared a laundry list of grievances. But his dad was there to apologize. He admitted that he had wronged his wife and children. He begged Tony for forgiveness.

His father's contrition moved Tony, and he quickly set aside his anger. But he had to ask one thing: Why had his father done it?

His father offered multiple explanations without excusing his actions. But one in particular stood out. He said, "I felt like my life wasn't my own anymore." Tony looked into his dad's eyes and said, "It wasn't yours to begin with."

The thrust of Paul's argument in [1 Corinthians 6:12–20](#) is that believers do not have full authority over their lives. We are members of Christ's body. We are a temple of the Holy Spirit. We belong to God and must act in ways that glorify God. God calls us to live as those who

belong to him.

That requires our willingness to resist temptations. And forms of temptation exist today that did not exist in Paul's day. Yet the principles Paul teaches remain useful in combating these temptations. Paul encouraged his readers to embrace and live in their identities as Christ's body and the Holy Spirit's temple. We, too, can and must help ourselves and our children walk in a way that is consistent with the identity God has given us.

It is noteworthy that Paul did not simply reject the slogans of the Corinthians. Nor did he merely give them commands without explanation. He granted that they did indeed possess freedom in Christ. But how were they best using those freedoms? And in what way are we accomplishing this?

B. Prayer

Father God, thank you for making us part of your Son Jesus Christ's body, the church. Lead us to respect our individual bodies as belonging to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Glorify God with your body.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or

in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Invite learners to share stories about something valuable they gave to someone who misused it because it didn't cost them anything. Caution learners not to use names. Discuss reactions to that disappointment.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Appropriate Care” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow one minute for learners to complete it individually as indicated. Form small groups for discussing conclusions.

Say, “If we lend or give a valuable item to someone, we expect that person to value it as we do. Today, we will learn what is valuable to God and how he expects us to be good stewards of what is his.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read [1 Corinthians 6:12–13](#). Ask the class for names of activities that people have a legal right to do. After listing a half dozen activities on the board, place learners into small groups of three or four. Distribute handouts (you prepare) on which are printed these questions:

- 1—Which of these rights are truly beneficial?
- 2—Which of these rights can be or have been abused, causing harm?
- 3—How did Paul address an ancient problem in this regard?

Reconvene for whole-class discussion as groups wrap up their work. Be ready to correct misconceptions as needed.

Ask a volunteer to read [1 Corinthians 6:14–18](#). Divide participants into two groups, named as below. Distribute handouts (you create) as

follows for group discussions.

Know-Ye-Not-1 Group: Read [1 Corinthians 6:14–15](#) and [12:12–27](#).

- 1—How does our earlier discussion on the treatment of valuable things come into play here?
- 2—What do these verses teach us about our roles and responsibilities toward one another and toward Christ?
- 3—In what ways have you seen the misuse of one body part affect the whole body?

Know-Ye-Not-2 Group: Read [1 Corinthians 6:16–17](#) and [Ephesians 4:19–25](#).

- 1—What do these verses teach us about our responsibilities toward one another and toward Christ?
- 2—What are some ways that we are neglectful of our spiritual unity with the Lord?

Ask another volunteer to read [1 Corinthians 6:19–20](#). Divide participants into three small groups and assign the following passages, one each: [Genesis 39](#); [Daniel 1:5–15](#); and [Hebrews 11:8–12](#). Distribute hand-outs (you create) with the following questions:

- 1—How did the person glorify and honor God with his body?
- 2—How did this affect those around him?
- 3—What are ways to follow these examples today?

Reconvene for whole-class summaries. Reread [1 Corinthians 6:19–20](#) for emphasis.

Option. Distribute copies of the “The Price” exercise from the activity page. Use the top part to wrap up this segment; use the bottom part to lead into the Into Life segment. Have participants work in pairs to com-

plete the top half as indicated.

Into Life

Invite learners to summarize the imperatives in today's lesson text. Jot responses on the board. Brainstorm ways to apply those imperatives in various situations. If you used the option above, have participants fill out the bottom half individually; stress that these are for their private use.

Challenge participants to review all the ideas and choose one that they will put into practice in the week ahead. Recruit volunteers willing to share their experiences. Invite further reflections on ways to apply Paul's principles daily.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(August 10—Our Bodies Belong to God\)](#)
