

Sermon for January 18, 2015 -2nd Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 6:12-20. (NIV 84)

Theme: “Your Body Belongs to God”

- 1) Your body has been sanctified for the Lord. (v.13)
- 2) Your body is a member of Christ’s body (v. 15)
- 3) Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (v. 19)

¹² *“Everything is permissible for me”--but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”--but I will not be mastered by anything.* ¹³ *“Food for the stomach and the stomach for food”--but God will destroy them both. The body 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 he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.* ¹⁸ *Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.* ¹⁹ *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;* ²⁰ *you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that our society vehemently fights against the 6th Commandment. And how sad this is for our children! I don’t think we fully appreciate the danger our sons and daughters are in. Society’s distortion of sexuality not only permeates the books, movies, music and TV shows that surround them; our children also have to face a public education system that tells them it's ok to explore those things which God’s Word forbids - as long as they are careful and educate themselves.

How do we protect our children from society’s influences? How do we protect ourselves from the temptations of the flesh? St. Paul shows us the way: we can win the victory by remembering the awesome honor God has granted our bodies in Christ Jesus. Let us consider this honor and how it keeps us pure, under the theme: **“Your Body Belongs to God”** 1) *Your body has been sanctified for the Lord.* 2) *Your body is a member of Christ’s body.* 3) *Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.*

Part One: Your body has been sanctified for the Lord.

The morals of Corinth in Paul’s day share many parallels with our society today. Things were so bad in that city that, throughout the Roman Empire, the term “Corinthian Girl” became a euphemism for “prostitute.” The Christians in Corinth were certainly inundated with temptations of the flesh and, sadly, many of them fell into sin– defending their actions with the mantra: *“Everything is permissible for me.”* In other words, “I am free to do whatever I want.”

What made the Corinthians think this way? Probably a misunderstanding of the Gospel. They thought that since Jesus died on the cross for their sins, freeing them from their bondage to the devil, they were now free to do whatever they want because they had Christ’s grace and forgiveness to fall back on.

But, as Paul so masterfully points out, Jesus didn’t free us from our sins so that we could return to them. He freed us so that we might belong to Him.

And so Paul responds to the Corinthian's mantra by saying: *"Everything is permissible for me"--but not everything is beneficial.* Just because no one can stop me from eating 10 Big Macs a day, doesn't mean that I should. And why not? Because the short term pleasure those tasty burgers offer would, in the long run, hurt both me and the ones I love. In the same way, just because no one will stop you from indulging in the temptations of the flesh, doesn't mean you should. And why not? Those sins never benefit, but always come back to hurt and haunt you.

The misguided sinner says, *"Everything is permissible for me,"* and Paul responds by saying: *"but I will not be mastered by anything."* We might think: "It's my body and I am in control. I can do with it whatever I want and stop at any time," but this is a lie. We can't master sin, sin always masters us! It always taunts, tempts and addicts. Sin is slavery, and this is exactly why the world cannot overcome its cravings of the flesh.

This is why the world defends its morality by saying: *"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food."* In other words, just as it is natural to satisfy the hunger of our stomachs, it should be just as natural to satisfy the cravings of the other members of our body – why else would they be there?

Paul responds by saying: *but God will destroy them both.* In other words, even though God has given us food and the ability to enjoy it, and has also created us male and female and given us marriage as the means to enjoy intimacy; God also wants us to remember that these things are temporary. They will be done away with when Christ returns on judgment day. Our bodies, however, are not just meant for this life, as food and marital intimacy are.

The body 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.

The unbelieving world looks at the human body and sees an evolved animal that needs to selfishly fulfill its various cravings and appetites.

God wants us, however, to view our bodies differently. They are masterpieces, originally created in his image to glorify his name, and enjoy fellowship with him. Sin, however, has corrupted us to such a degree that our bodies lost this honor. But God has restored it. How? By sending his own Son to take on human flesh and blood in order to purify both our bodies and souls from all sin. Jesus accomplished this through his perfect life and innocent suffering and death. And to show that his work for us was more than good enough to purify both our bodies and souls, God physically raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to his right hand in heaven. And just as he raised Jesus' body from the dead, so he will raise our bodies, which he sanctified through the blood of his Son, so that we might live with him forever in heaven.

When the devil tempts you with the sinful cravings of the flesh, resist temptation by remembering this wonderful truth: Jesus has redeemed and sanctified your body for the LORD. You belong to him. He will help you overcome temptation because, through his work of redemption, He has united us with himself, as St. Paul says:

Part Two: Your body is a member of Christ's body

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

Through baptism the LORD has united us with Jesus. In Holy Communion His body and His blood are united with ours. He lives in us and works through us. We are all members of his body on earth. We are

his mouth, when we tell people about his great work for us. We are his hands, when we help a brother and sister in need. We are his heart, when we compassionately pray for all the hurting and lost. We are united with Christ – members of His body. What could be more noble and sacred than that!

So let me ask you: Would you ever consider throwing your cross into a manure pit? Would you ever think of tearing pages out of the Bible, to use as a dish rag? If we would never dream of desecrating holy objects in this way, then why would we even consider desecrating the most holy object we own: our own body?

Paul asks: *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 he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*

Whenever a person shares the unique intimacy God reserved for marriage with someone else, they are uniting with that person in a very special way – not just physically, but spiritually as well. God created this act of intimacy to be a demonstration of the unselfish commitment, love and unity promised in the marriage vow. Therefore, if we share this special intimacy with someone who is not our spouse, we defile God's holy gift – we are stealing and destroying the holy thing, which belongs to our current (or, if we are unmarried, future) spouse. More than that, we, since we are one with Jesus through faith, desecrate his body and tarnish his reputation.

This, then, is the second way we can overcome temptations of the flesh: remember that Christ loves you so much that He has united you to himself. He lives and works through you. He has washed you from all sin through the blood he shed for you on the cross. When God looks at you, He sees Jesus – his Son. Therefore when you look at your body, see Christ, because this is exactly what God sees. And seeing Christ, let us heed Paul's encouragement to:

Part Three: Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit

Flee from sexual immorality. Understand the danger that threatens your soul. Stay away from images that lead you to lust. Throw away the novels that corrupt your thoughts. Turn off the music that glorifies sin. Stay away from the person who's turning your heart from what's right. Run away from these things like you would run away from someone trying to kill you; because that is exactly what the devil is trying to do.

All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. The devil is trying to desecrate the most holy possession you have. He wants to corrupt your thoughts, make you a slave to your passions, and soil your soul with guilt. Trust me, I have counselled enough people to know these kinds of sins cause immense guilt – troubling Christians throughout their lives and trying to steal away the peace of Christ's forgiveness.

St. Paul says: *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?* Yes, your body is very special to the LORD. The word translated in this verse as temple is actually the word for the inner sanctuary – the Most holy place - where God himself dwells. When God called you to faith, He himself made his home in you. Think about what this means – the awesome comfort contained in this verse. God is always with you. He loves you so much that He lives with in you – forgiving every sin when you repent. You can run to him at any time for help to overcome temptation. So, run to him for help! Don't anger him by willingly desecrating his temple through sexual sins. Realize that:

You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. The mantra of our society is: "It's my body, I can do with it what I please." Is that true? No, your body is not your own. Jesus paid for it with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death. Our bodies and souls belong to God, and how thankful I am that it is so! Why? Because if I belong to God, then he will keep me safe - using me to glorify his name and keeping his promise to take me to be with him forever in heaven.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: when faced with the temptations of the flesh, remember that your body belongs to God. He has washed it clean from all sin, united it with himself and sent His Holy Spirit to live in you. How great is the honor God has lavished on us that we get to be so united with Him! Let this wonderful truth move you to flee temptation – seeking refuge in His Word and Sacraments.

But what if we succumb to the temptations of the flesh? What if we are guilty of desecrating our bodies a lot? What if we are still caught in a web of sin, and can't seem to get out? Then listen carefully to what I am about to say: Go to Christ in prayer. Repent of your sins by confessing them to him and asking for forgiveness - and then remember the cross where Jesus paid for your sin and the empty tomb, which proves you are forgiven. The LORD himself says: *"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool (Isaiah 1:18, NIV84).* The Bible also says: *The LORD does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* (Psa 103:10-12 NIV84)

Even if feelings of guilt remain, know that your sins are completely forgiven in Christ. The LORD himself promises it, and nothing (including your feelings of unworthiness) can change that fact. You are a member of Christ's holy body – pure, holy and free from all sin. God continues to live in you. And in the peace of this forgiveness, ask God to help you avoid sin. Talk to a trusted Christian friend or pastor about your struggles. They will not condemn you, but remind you of God's wonderful grace and help you overcome these temptations – helping you rejoice in the fact that you belong to God. Amen.