

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 409, 01-17-2021 † Epiphany 2

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

**1 CORINTHIANS 6**

<sup>12</sup>“All things are permitted for me”—but not all things are beneficial. “All things are permitted for me”—but I will not allow anything to control me. <sup>13</sup>“Foods are for the belly, and the belly is for foods, but God will do away with both of them.” However, the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. <sup>14</sup>God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. <sup>15</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then remove the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Certainly not! <sup>16</sup>Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For it says, “The two will become one flesh.” <sup>17</sup>But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.

<sup>18</sup>Flee from sexual immorality! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup>for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.



I gave you my earthquake story last week; so I can give you my fire story this week. (“Shake and bake,” as they say in California.) One day in November I got out of my car in the morning in the church parking lot and I felt ashes falling from the sky, which was a sickly color of green. I looked across the valley to see orange flames dancing along the ridge. It came within 3 miles of church and 3 blocks of the parsonage. A couple families and two widows stayed overnight at our church. There was no making light of God’s gift of fire that day.

Don't get me wrong; fire is a good thing—from a distance. I'm fine with fire—over there. God gave us fire to heat and light and power our devices. But it needs boundaries. Fire can get out of hand and burn things down and hurt people.

In the same way, God has given us the gift of our bodies for purposes of pleasure. He gives us times of romance and enjoyment of unmentionable parts, but only within certain boundaries. As with all of God's gifts, we can love a good thing like sex badly. We can abuse God's gift.

Yet Paul doesn't just hit us hard with the Law and no power to follow it. Paul offers some rich Gospel to help us see ourselves better, to see the beauty of our human bodies, and to understand how connected we are to Jesus.

## **Jesus Christ And Your Whole Heart**

St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth no fewer than 3 times, although we do not have all those letters. This first letter that was preserved for us is incredibly practical and useful for many reasons. In chapters 7 and following Paul would address specific questions the Corinthians originally asked. But chapters 1-6 Paul uses to address problems he had heard about them in a report.

One problem in a great, big city like Corinth was that people used slogans or catchphrases as an excuse to break the 6th commandment—the commandment having to do with adultery and sexual sins. Slogans in Corinth sounded like, “Everything is permissible.” “Food is for the belly, and the belly for food.” We have similar sayings. Some say, “anything goes,” or even “Christian freedom” is sometimes wielded as an end-around, a way to get by God's commandments. Similarly, people say, “I have needs,” as if their sinful appetite is unstoppable and self-discipline is just unnecessarily prolonging the inevitable sins. What a horrible abuse it is to pit Christian freedom against God's will, as if they were two opposing things! What a pity to lose our moral compass just because it feels good! This is sinful abuse of Christian freedom. We all grapple with this problem in our sin.

Generally speaking, when we identify something as neither commanded nor forbidden in the Bible, that is the beginning of the discussion, not the end. If a decision falls within the realm of Christian freedom, we have only begun to

decide it. We look to God's commandments, articles of the creed, and the Lord's Prayer perhaps to learn how to handle each and every situation.

Today, some will say, "My body, my choice," or, "Love is love." It seems to suggest that Jesus set us free, so I can do what feels good in Christian freedom. These thoughts pass for excuses when people engage in sexual activity outside the bond of marriage, same-sex attraction, or premarital sins. It is as if to say, "This are my fingers and toes, God ... MY arms and legs, MY stomach to fill and heart to love and MY head to think through for MYSELF. I think I know what I'm doing. Hands off, God," they may say. Many still defend themselves, "Oh, I'm still a Christian. Isn't God full of love? Doesn't He want me to be happy?" They ask, "Why is Jesus so concerned with my romantical life?" or, "What kind of strange God is so interested in what I do with my unmentionables?"

This would almost make some spiritual sense if it didn't just skip over something extremely big: The Son of God spent His whole body on you to buy you back and make you His own. Jesus spent His fingers and toes, arms and legs, His heart and stomach, His side and face to make you His very own. This reconciled you to the Father in all His holiness, and this united you to Jesus.

So God wants your body, and all its members, but why? It is because He wants your heart. He wants your heart first. He wants your whole heart. Solomon said, "*Above all things, guard your heart; for from it flows the well-spring of life*" (Prov. 4:23). Why?

Jesus has joined His heart with yours. He has spent His heart on you, and in so doing He has united Himself to you. "*You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body*" (v19-20). You believers are the highest object of His love. No one else gets this special indwelling of Christ Jesus within you, than the true Church, those who put their trust in Jesus as Savior. Ever since you were brought to believe in Him, He has made your heart His own dwelling place. He calls you His temple. This is a mysterious presence—that Jesus dwells in you. Yet it is a very special presence. Your body is His temple. You are closely united in Him. "*He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him*" (v17).

How united would we like to be with Jesus? Would you like to rise from the dead on the last day, just as He was raised on Easter? St. Paul goes there. He explains that "*God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power*"

(v14). This is a beautiful saying. Paul is essentially repeating Jesus words, who said, "*I am the resurrection and the life ... whoever believes in Me will live, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.*" Again, "*Because I live, you also will live.*" Jesus Christ's resurrection is the source and cause of our resurrection.

When you are promised the grace and glory of rising again—the solution to death—it only makes sense to get close to that person. When you consider restraining yourself and putting up boundaries to live as Jesus asks for 70 or 80 years, knowing that you have an eternity in store for you; do you throw God's will for you away? Or do you bow to God's will and trust that God has more in store?

So Paul ends up recommending one major piece of advice when confronted with immorality: Flee. Run away. Get out of that situation. If you wish to burn down the boundaries of marriage, then understand that goes both ways. You risk burning the boundaries of marriage with your very own Bridegroom. Yes, you already have a husband—a heavenly husband. You are already wedded to Jesus, who puts you above all else.

Some today say that their bodies are a temple so they can eat right and exercise. While those are good things, if you look closely 1 Corinthians 6 is only talking about sexual immorality and sins of that nature. This sin is in some way different from *all other sins* that are *outside a person's body*. This is important to God.

We don't have as many fires in Indiana. But we do have roundabouts here. On my way home from church last Sunday, approaching a roundabout, I realized there was a car in the inner circle, but going the wrong way. Fortunately, he wasn't getting off where I was entering, but he drove right on by. There's another good example of loving God's gifts badly. Right idea, wrong way! How dangerous! We thank God today. When we loved God's gifts badly and used our bodies harmfully, He loved us. He plucked us out of our unmentionable sins, dusted us off, washed us clean, kept us close, defended us, comforted us, justified us, and renews us, at what great price? At the glorious price of His own body, and in the glorious promise that, by faith alone, He will glorify your body; in Jesus' name, Amen.