

The Body for the Lord and the Lord for the Body

Analysis of First Corinthians 6:9-20

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In the first six chapters of his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul is giving some strong reproof to the church that he had founded on his previous missionary journey. News had apparently reached the apostle about some problems among the believers in Corinth. He spends a considerable portion of his letter (the first four chapters in our English text) exposing their division and the root causes and ultimate effects of it. He then moves on to three different individual sins that are besetting the congregation. In the fifth chapter, he addresses the failure of the church to properly discipline a member engaged in an incestuous relationship. The following chapter opens with the issue of church members suing one another and closes with an argument against the practice of another aspect of sexual immorality involving prostitutes.

In the midst of these three rebukes stands a three-fold reminder of the new life, new behavior and new standing the Corinthians ought to be enjoying. Great intro and lead to your paragraph! I Corinthians 6:9-11 help to tie the three strong warnings together. interesting The lists in 6:9-10 include the same vices listed in 5:10-11 and add four more from similar categories. After his strong warning to those who would make a practice of these sins and a concluding note of hope, Paul then turns to the third individual problem plaguing the church in 6:12-20.

The arguments that the apostle uses to combat the faulty thinking of the Corinthians employ several of their own slogans. A brief explanation how you: 1) knew these were Corinthian slogans, and 2) decided which were the slogans and which were Paul's responses, would be helpful. First, he repeats the phrase "all things are lawful for me" twice, but clarifies it to the point that it would be impossible to draw hedonistic conclusions from it. In his assertion, "even though I have the freedom to act with regard to all things, I will not be mastered by anything." he is clarifying the church's perspective on liberty. Secondly, he includes a rebuttal to the idiom "meats for the belly and the belly for meats," which was being used to justify their

immoral practices. His statement, “the body for the Lord and the Lord for the body,” refines and corrects their view of physical/spiritual dualism. Finally, he refutes the notion that “every sin is outside the body,” declaring that the man who sins sexually sins “against his own body. By turning these three slogans on their heads, Paul removes their excuses for engaging in sexual immorality. Thus, the timeless truth that is central to the apostles teaching in this passage is summed up in the closing verses saying that our bodies do not belong to us, but rather to the Lord. What we do in our physical, temporal bodies has spiritual and eternal significance. Therefore we ought to glorify God with our bodies.

In order to understand the full weight of Paul’s logical arguments, not only does the reader need to analyze the two Corinthian slogans, but also two several words:

1. Fornicator/Fornication (Strong’s number 4205)

This word is translated in various versions in the context of general immorality, sexual immorality, and prostitution. In the original language, the root word is πορνῶν (pōrnōs), from which we get the English word pornography. According to Blomberg, it is “the broadest term for sexual sin in the Greek language, embracing any form of intercourse between two individuals who are not united in heterosexual marriage.” (The NIV Application Commentary, p. 146) It occurs in three different forms a total of six times in these verses. Good. You explained in class that in the “sin list” you saw “fornicator” is more prominent than the others, and therefore a key word even in the list. Do you explain that somewhere.

2. Lawful vs. Mastered (Strong’s number 1832, 1849, 1850)

This word appears in several forms in Paul’s letter, first in 6:12 as “lawful”, then in 8:9 as “liberty”, and several times in 9:3-18 as “right”. It comes from the Greek root

ἐξέστι (ēxēsti) and implies the freedom, power or permission to act. (Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 646) In the passage under consideration it is used in contrast with a derivation of ἐξουσιαζῶ (ēxōusiazō) to form a bit of word play in the Greek. This second word carries with it the idea of being overpowered by or under the authority of something or someone. (Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 253) Together, these words occur are used a total of fourteen times in Paul's letter.

3. Body (Strong's number 4983)

This word is used in several ways in the Greek New Testament to have difference nuances of meaning. It can refer to the "corporeal body, whether of a man or of some other creature either living or dead." (Zodhiates, Lexical Aids to the New Testament) It also is used of the Church (as in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12), of substance (as opposed to shadows in Colossians 2:17), and of those reduced to slavery (as a spoil of war in Revelation 18:13). Some writers would posit that the root σῶμα (sōma) refers more to the complete being or the personality, thus taking the emphasis off the distinction between body and spirit. (Fee, 256) It occurs eight times in these verses.

The Unrighteous Shall Not Inherit the Kingdom (I Corinthians 6:9-10)

Paul begins the transition from his discussion of frivolous lawsuits back into the topic of sexual immorality with a rhetorical device that is becoming familiar to the readers of the letter.

The phrase "know you not that...?" occurs ten times in I Corinthians and only once in the rest of Paul's epistles. He has already employed it in 3:16 and 5:6 and uses it a total of six times in this

chapter alone. Given their own interest in wisdom and knowledge, the writer turns to this sarcasm less to provide a reminder of something he had previously told them and more to point to something they already should know inherently. (Fee, 146)

The reality which should have been understood by the Corinthian church was that the unrighteous or the unjust have no part in the kingdom of God. Paul's purpose is not to list sins that will cause one to be disinherited, rather to catalog the major types of sins that characterize wicked societies such as the one in which his readers dwelt. (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, p. 141) He uses nouns as labels that indicate a persistent pattern, making it plain that he is not referring to individual acts or temporary lapses of this behavior. Excellent point Six of these are repeated from 5:11, including the "immoral person" (fornicator), the covetous, the idolater, the reviler, the drunkard and the swindler. To these he adds three other types of sexual sins, including the adulterer, the effeminate and the homosexual, as well as one other sin of greed, the thief. It is interesting to note here that the same three temptations that were presented to Eve in the garden are represented in this list. According to I John 2:16, these can be categorized as "...the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life..."

To the general notion of sexual immorality, Paul adds levels of definition and clarity to end the word games the Corinthians enjoyed playing. The word *adulterers* refers specifically to married people indulging in sexuality outside the marriage relationship. The word *effeminate*, also translated as male prostitutes, carries a root meaning of soft, luxurious or dainty. (Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, vol. III, p. 215) But here it used in a much darker way, most likely referring to the more passive partner in a homosexual relationship. Huh. Interesting. (Fee, 243) The word *homosexuals*, also translated sodomites, is not frequently used in other literature as it is derived from a compound of male and a vulgar slang for intercourse. The

context of the verse leads the reader to assume a reference to the more active partner in homosexuality. (Fee, 244) The word *drunkards* is a self-explanatory addition to these “lusts of the flesh”.

The following verse moves on to the “lust of the eyes,” listing three types of selfish behavior. The word *thieves* follows naturally from a discussion of lawsuits, as would the *covetous* and the *swindlers*. The covetous person wants something that belongs to someone else, while the swindler takes unfair advantage of others to trick them out of it and the thief simply takes it outright. (MacArthur, 142-143) In any case, these people are clearly dissatisfied with their lot in life and are caught up in a way of life alien to the kingdom of God. (Blomberg, 118)

The final category of sins – the boastful pride of life – is less fully represented in this list but nonetheless present. In the midst of the fleshly sins in 6:10 Paul includes *idolaters*, referring to anyone worshiping false gods or caught up in a false religious system. (MacArthur, 141) The Greek word for *revilers* has a root related to the word for mischief and carries a connotation of slander and blasphemy. (Zodhiates) Throughout his writings, Paul speaks in no uncertain terms of the severity of the sins committed with the tongue. He ends his list by repeating the warning that those who persist in such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. As is usually the case, the apostle does not end with the warning, but moves on to exhort and encourage the Corinthians that such was not the case for them. He continues in the following verse to provide hope.

But You Were... (I Corinthians 6:12)

The key in this verse seems to be the three-fold use of the strong adversative particle “but,” which adds emphasis to the theme of “once you were, but now you are not.” (Fee, 246) First, the writer reminds his readers that some (not all) of them were in the past full participants

in this lifestyle against which he had just so strongly warned. Apparently, some of them were still not living any differently from those excluded from the kingdom. Paul provides a series of theological facts as a basis for the implied command to stop being like the wicked. (Fee, 245) His argument can be distilled to the statement, “you are different, now act like it!” good

The three verbs used to describe what should have been a present reality for the Corinthians form somewhat of a primer in soteriological language. The first phrase *but you were washed* speaks of the new life that is received through spiritual cleansing and regeneration.

(MacArthur, 143) The apostle uses similar wording in Titus 3:5 where he reminds us that Jesus “...saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” The second phrase *but you were sanctified* speaks of the new behavior which a transformed life always produces.

Hmmm...why does he write it in the past tense then. Certainly they had not and were not exhibiting behavior of a transformed life. Is this MacArthur’s bias coming through.

(MacArthur, 143) In Romans 6:22, Paul says, “... having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. The third phrase *but you were justified* speaks of the new standing before God. (MacArthur, 143) This imputed righteousness is the theme of another of the author’s letters. In Romans 5:1-2 he asserts that, “... having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As a grammatical aside, it should be noted that of these three verbs used to describe the new life, behavior and standing of the believer, all are in the aorist tense, indicating an action occurring in past time. However, the second two verbs *sanctified* and *justified* are in the passive voice, indicating that the subject receives the action of the verb, but the first verb *washed* is in the middle voice, indicating the subject acting on his own behalf, or participating in the results of the

verbal action. (Zodhiates) The ramification of these nuances of language, although undoubtedly profitable and worthy of investigating, are nonetheless beyond the scope of this analysis.

Paul draws this passage of encouragement to a close with an implicit reference to the triune nature of God as the agent of change for the believers in Corinth. Scholars are not in unilateral agreement about the parallelism between the three aspects of conversion and the three-fold agency. The clarity of the structure is somewhat clouded by the use of only two prepositional phrases to modify the activity rather than three. What is clear, however, is an understanding of what God has done *for* the believers by the work of Jesus Christ and *in* the believers by the work of the Holy Spirit. (Fee, 247) yes. Bring out the odd contrast between their sinful behavior (the “sin list) and their marvelous position. With this transitional exhortation complete, Paul is ready to turn his attention back to the arena of sexual ethics in the church.

Power to Act, Under the Power of None (I Corinthians 6:12)

After dealing with the problem of the incestuous man in 5:1-13 and the problem of the church “airing its dirty laundry” in 6:1-8, the apostle now addresses the problem of men in the Christian community arguing for the right to go to the prostitutes. The port city of Corinth was well-known in the ancient world for the materialism and immorality associated not only with its favorable business location but also with the temple of Aphrodite. (Walvoord & Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 505) Whether the temple prostitutes literally numbered one thousand is irrelevant; it is sufficient to say that sexual promiscuity and licentious behavior in general ran rampant in the city and was wreaking havoc in the church as well. Apparently some of the contemporary phraseology had been employed among the believers to justify their own

immoral behavior. Their defense demonstrates not only the problem of tainting Godly wisdom with worldly philosophy, but also belies a faulty understanding of Christian liberty and the relationship between body and spirit. Paul takes up the counter argument by turning some of their own catchphrases against them. Ah, okay, so you are going to move on to the next section after all!

The arguments that Paul begins to mount in this section differ in style from the previous teaching on incest and lawsuits in that here he starts to attack not their behavior but rather the theology behind it. (Fee, 251) “All things are lawful for me” is possibly a phrase that started with Paul and had become twisted over time. It certainly could have been misinterpreted by the Corinthian people if they had been exposed to his teaching to the Galatians. Whether it originated from Paul or elsewhere, he quickly and sharply corrects their error and brings it in harmony with the law of love.

He reminds them first that the more important question is not “is it permitted?” but rather “is it profitable?” Several chapters later, the apostle repeats the phrase and adds to it the question “will it edify?” (10:23) The implication in his first qualifier is that the use of liberty ought to be others-oriented. His second qualifier reminds the believer that even though he has freedom, subjecting oneself to sin is not freedom at all but rather slavery. Paul’s creative wordplay with *exousia* might be better captured in the English as “even though I have *power* to act in *all* things, I will not be *overpowered* by the *one* thing.” (Fee, 252-253) To allow oneself to be mastered by something, particularly as it relates to the sexual sin that he will now turn to deal with, certainly does not demonstrate a proper Biblical understanding of love for self.

The Body for the Lord, the Lord for the Body (I Corinthians 6:13-14)

The second phrase that Paul takes issue with is another expression of liberty, this time pertaining to foods. Literally translated “meats for the belly and the belly for meats,” this slogan expresses a biological truth about a purely physical and thus temporal relationship between food and our bodies. (MacArthur, 150) It is possible that the slogan also included the idea that God will do away with both of them, or that Paul added this thought on his own. However, the believers in Corinth apparently had taken this slogan and extended this idea to include all aspects of physical endeavors, including sexual relationships. They reasoned that all bodily appetites are essentially alike, therefore the body is for sex and sex is for the body. (Fee, 255) They used this fallacious analogy to rationalize their illicit sexual practices, including visiting the temple prostitutes, which the apostle addresses directly in the verses to follow. However, Paul asserts that they are wrong on both counts, saying “the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” Right. Good.

He continues by explaining that in the same way as God raised the Lord, so he will raise us up. One commentator explains, “Our bodies are designed not only to serve in this life but in the life to come.” (MacArthur, 150) This verse lends strong support for the physical resurrection of the body, a concept which Paul will further address later in the letter. However, in connection with this teaching on sexual sin it reminds the reader that the physical nature of our human bodies is not limited to our earthly experience. Jesus himself demonstrated this in His own glorified body by eating and drinking with the disciples following His resurrection. Excellent argument for the literally physical resurrection of Christ.

Members of Christ, Joined to the Lord (I Corinthians 6:15-17)

The apostle continues to elucidate the relationship between body and spirit by offering two premises and drawing the necessary conclusion. The first premise is that our bodies are “members of Christ,” a principle echoed in Romans when teaching on the responsibility of believers toward the church and again in his letter to the Ephesians in his discourse on the responsibility of believers toward their spouses. The second premise draws on the Old Testament teaching that in sexual intercourse two bodies become one flesh. The case is stated strongly that the one who *cleaves* to a prostitute is one body with her, but the one who cleaves to the Lord is united to Him spiritually. The parallel construction used in the writing continues to break down the flawed perspective on the separation of body and spirit. The chiasmic argument is formed as follows:

- A Their bodies are members of Christ’s body;
- B therefore, they may not be members of a prostitute’s.
- B' Joined to a prostitute they become one body with her;
- A' joined to Christ they become one spirit with Him.

The logical conclusion is that since both are bodily relationships and both imply a union, the two relationships are mutually exclusive. (Fee, 257) One commentator further states that prostitution “creates the grotesque connection of the One who represents ultimate commitment with the act the represents the most casual of sexual relationships.” (Blomberg, 126)

Flee Fornication (I Corinthians 6:18)

To this point, Paul has been arguing toward an inherent prohibition to the theologically untenable practice of visiting prostitutes. What should have been obvious through reason and intuition, he will now make explicitly clear. “Flee fornication!” begins his next thought. This

present imperative is followed by yet another gem of current Corinthian culture that the apostle seeks to refute. In many English translations, the phrase is rendered “Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body.” However, the word *other* is neither in the original Greek, nor entirely correct. Obviously there are other sins such as gluttony and drunkenness that are committed against one’s own body, so Paul either would have had to employ hyperbole or imply something else. Lowery points to the similar construction with that of verse 13 to suggest that this phrase was quoted to support their epicurean ways. (W&Z, 517) The notion is consistent with their false understanding of dualism in making a distinction between body and spirit.

However, the apostle again turns their thinking around and asserts that sexual sin, perhaps in a way totally unlike other sins, has a corruptive and destructive impact on the physical body. Is there evidence of this, or is the Apostle using “body” in a different sense, perhaps. One commentator states that “...although sexual sin is not necessarily the worst sin, it is the most unique in its character.” (MacArthur, 151) Byrne notes that the one who sins sexually “...perverts precisely that faculty within himself that is meant to be the instrument of the most intimate bodily communication between persons.” (Blomberg, 127) Perhaps Paul is considering this gravity, or possibly reminding us of Joseph’s response (Genesis 39:12) with his strong command to flee this most unique and serious sin.

The Dwelling Place of God, the Redeemed of God (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

Paul closes out this section of teaching on sexual immorality by employing two more metaphors to help the Corinthians better understand the relationship between the physical and the spiritual. First he returns to the image of the temple which he first referred to in 3:16. However, where initially he addressed them in the plural so as to say “you yourselves *collectively* are a

temple”, here he uses the singular to say “your *individual* body is a temple”. (could this be the “body” Paul was referring to? It is a possibly you have to dismiss) The word used is the Greek ναός (naōs), referring not just to the temple area, but specifically to the Holy of Holies, the very dwelling place of God. (Gæbelein, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 225) This reality of Christians as the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit is echoed not only by Paul, but also by Jesus through John in his gospel (7:38-39; 20:22) and through Luke in Acts 1:8. The repugnant thought of committing sexual sin in a church auditorium should give us the same sense of offense regardless of location of the act. (MacArthur, 152)

The last image he uses to drive his point home is that of slavery. Paul uses the Greek word αγοράζω (agorazō) to say that we were “bought with a price”. This uses marketplace terminology to indicate that the one who bought us has the right of possession. (Zodhiates) He takes us back to the opening of his argument, closing the loop that began with the concept of liberty. The apostle makes the point that Christ purchased us for God, and that our body was included in that purchase. (Fee, 265) Therefore, we were not redeemed to freedom, as would have been argued by the phrase “all things are lawful”, but rather for slavery to the will of God, demonstrated by the phrase “you are not your own.”

Conclusion

This section – as well as the entire argument – is drawn together by a final imperative. The positive side of the prohibition *do not* use the body for illicit sexual relationships is the command *do* use the body to glorify God. Okay. Good. This is your timeless truth, right? Our bodies, having been made members of Christ, joined together in one spirit, built into a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit and purchased by the very blood of the Son of God, have one purpose:

to glorify God. The apostle Peter may have had this passage in mind as he wrote in his first letter:

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, " YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

At some times with a scalpel and at other times with a sledgehammer, Paul carefully and completely dissects and destroys the foolish thinking of the Corinthians. By turning their truisms upside down he makes it clear that what we do in our physical, temporal bodies has spiritual and eternal significance. Therefore we ought to glorify God with our bodies.

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All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by Lockman Foundation.)

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