

THE BODY MATTERS

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Second Sunday after Epiphany (Series B)

January 14, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The epistle lesson for the Second Sunday after Epiphany comes from *Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*, chapter 6, verses 12 through 20. It is on page 809 of the pew Bible. In this epistle lesson, Paul teaches us why what we do with our bodies matters. Please stand as you are able for the epistle lesson. From 1 Corinthians 6, beginning at verse 12, we read in Jesus' name.

¹² "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear saints, the body matters. Your body matters. It matters to you, it matters to God, and it matters to the rest of this body. And by "this body," I mean the congregation. Your physical body—consisting of your eyes, ears, hands, feet, stomach, heart, and everything else—it matters. Every part of it matters. What you do with it and what you do to it matters to God and also to the rest of this congregation. This is what Paul teaches in the text we just read. And Paul specifically applies this principle to the issue of sexual immorality.

Now for those of you who know me fairly well, you can probably guess this is not my favorite subject to talk about. Some people seem to like to talk about it a lot. I don't. But, in the interest of teaching the entire counsel of God's Word, and not merely the parts I'm comfortable with, I feel compelled to address this or other sensitive issues when the lectionary gives them to us.

So we are going to talk about this. I will not be graphic or explicit. It's usually better not to be. In the *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther was very wise in how he dealt with this subject. When explaining the Ten Commandments, he typically explained both what the commandment prohibits—that is, what the commandment tells us *not* to do—and what the commandment

promotes. So, for example, regarding the Fifth Commandment, which is, “You shall not murder,” Luther explains it by saying, “We should fear and love God so that we do our neighbor no bodily harm nor cause him any suffering, but help and befriend him in every need.” So the Fifth Commandment prohibits anything that might cause bodily harm or suffering, and it promotes helping and befriending our neighbors. It both prohibits and promotes. And we can imagine how the Sixth Commandment does the same thing. The Sixth Commandment is the one that says, “You shall not commit adultery.” And so we might expect Luther to expand on what it means to commit adultery. But he doesn’t. He explains the Sixth Commandment by simply saying, “We should fear and love God so that we lead a chaste and pure life in word and deed, and that husband and wife love and honor each other.” The Sixth Commandment prohibits plenty of things, but Luther doesn’t actually say what those are. He only states what we should do. Now why is that? We might guess that Luther was just a sixteenth century prude who was afraid to talk about sex. But he wasn’t. Luther was actually kind of vulgar at times, and he did talk about sex in some of his writings. If I said from this pulpit some of the things Luther wrote, you might start looking for a new pastor. Luther was not a prude. So I think there is a different reason. And it’s this: sinful humans are imaginative enough that we don’t need any help in identifying the various different ways we might break the Sixth Commandment. So Luther decides to not give us any ideas. And I for one am glad I don’t have to make our confirmation students memorize the different ways of breaking the Sixth Commandment. It is much better to focus our minds on what is right—that “We should fear and love God so that we lead a chaste and pure life in word and deed, and that husband and wife love and honor each other.” This is right and good, and anything contrary to it is wrong and evil.

The biblical teaching on marriage and sex is quite clear. You should get married, stay married, and only have sex with the person you are married to. And Jesus teaches us that we should not even think about doing anything else (Matt. 5:27-28). Not only are evil thoughts sinful in themselves, but they also lead to sinful and destructive outward actions.

It seems like every time I hear about a Christian pastor or leader who fell into disgrace, the story seems to follow the same pattern. It started with lustful thoughts and glances, then it usually went to pornography, and then it finally resulted in a sinful encounter with another person. There is a very real danger in merely entertaining the thought of sin. So the Christian sexual ethic is quite simple: Get married, stay married, only have sex with the person you are married to, and don’t even think about doing otherwise.

Now, in response to the Christian sexual ethic, the world has been saying for a long time, “It’s just sex. What’s the big deal?” The world sees the biblical teaching on this issue as repressive and unreasonable.

Now, I know there are varying degrees of sexual freedom that span the spectrum between the Christian sexual ethic on one side and complete sexual freedom on the other. Not everyone who rejects the Christian ethic goes so far as to say, “Whoever, whenever, just so long as everyone consents.” That, at least I hope, is still an extreme position.

So we have any number of different opinions along the spectrum. And, unfortunately, I simply cannot address all of them. It’s just not possible to do. So if I don’t address your particular viewpoint in this sermon, I hope that you will ask me about it some time. I promise to be kind, sympathetic, and confidential so that we can consider together what God’s will is as it is revealed in Scripture.

But for the sake of comparison, I'll simply contrast the Christian ethic with the secular ethic that says, "It's just sex." And this nonchalant approach to sex is actually very similar to what Paul encountered in Corinth.

The Corinthian Christians apparently had this idea that they were spiritual now that they belonged to Christ. They lived on a higher plane, and what they did with their bodies didn't really matter. They were spiritual beings—they thought—and their spirits were far more important than their bodies. They were wrong. They got this idea from Greek philosophers like Plato. But there's nothing Christian about it. The body matters.

First of all, God created our bodies. When he breathed life into Adam on the sixth day, he intended that life to stay there. God designed the human body to live forever. It's not just some shell we can do whatever we want with and throw away at the end.

Second, when the Son of God came to redeem us, he didn't come as a disembodied spirit. He took on a human body. He took on a human body, because he came to redeem our bodies. It is not merely our souls that are redeemed by Christ. It is our bodies too. A human being consists of body and soul, and Jesus Christ redeems complete persons.

Third, once Jesus had redeemed us by his atoning death on the cross, he did not leave his body behind. It was raised on the third day. That same body that he assumed at his conception in the Virgin Mary, which he grew up with, and which he died in—that very body was raised from the dead, and Jesus Christ lives forever, both body and soul.

And fourth, our bodies will be raised too. Just as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, we will be too. And just as his body was glorified into a perfect state without the effects of sin and death, so our bodies will be transformed too. God cares about the body. He created it. He assumed it. He redeemed it. He will raise it. And he will transform it to live forever.

The body matters. A human being consists of both body and soul, and the two of them are connected. This is especially true in matters of sexuality.

When the bodies of two people are joined together physically, they are also joined together spiritually. Their souls are bound together. And this connection lasts much longer than the physical connection. This creates all sorts of problems when you have sex with someone you're not supposed to. The problem with sex outside of marriage is that it does not exist. There is no such thing. Sex is marriage. The physical joining of two people also results in the spiritual joining of those people, and there is nothing we can do to stop this from happening. Even if all you intend is a physical activity, you cannot prevent the spiritual event from also happening. God designed them to be bound up together. This is why sex, when used properly, is such a wonderful thing. And I want to be clear to make a point of that. Sex is good. The Bible is not opposed to it. The first command recorded in the Bible is "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Sex is good. God designed it, and God commanded it. But, like so many other good things, when it is used wrongly, it can be terribly destructive.

The problem with two people having sex when they're not married, isn't that they're not married. The problem is that they are marrying themselves to each other, but they don't intend to marry themselves, and they don't recognize the long-term implications of their action. It's a marriage, but it's not a good one. This is why Paul says, "Do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For as it is written, 'The two will become one

flesh.” (6:16; Gen. 1:24) This is what the term “marriage” means; it means “to join together.” Sex is marriage.

Now you might be thinking, *But pastor, if what you’re saying is true, that means that one person could be married to lots of different people.* Now you see how this becomes so messy. And you see how gracious God is to give us commandments to protect us from these messes.

So in this way, the Law functions like a gate that would prevent a toddler from falling down the stairs. The gate forbids the toddler from going any further. The toddler doesn’t like it, and it probably makes the toddler curious about what will happen if they can get past the gate, but if the gate holds, the toddler is safe. And this is good for the toddler, whether they realize it or not.

Just like a wise and loving parent, our Heavenly Father gives us laws to protect us from hurting ourselves and those around us.

Because when we commit sexual immorality, it is not only ourselves who suffer the consequences. You also inflict harm on the person you sin with, and you cause harm to the person who really has ownership over your body. Our bodies are not our own to do whatever we want with. If you are married, your body belongs to your husband or your wife. It is not yours to do with as you please. You can cause physical and spiritual harm to your husband or wife. You can do this even if you’re not married to them yet.

And for all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus, our bodies are not our own. They belong to Christ. He redeemed you, body and soul, and you belong to him, body and soul. So when you take the members of your body, which are members of Christ, and you do immoral things with them, you cause harm to the body of Christ. You can even cause harm to this congregation, which is the body of Christ.

Now, as you hear all this, you might be thinking of all the ways you have broken this commandment. You’re thinking of things you have done which cannot be undone. And it’s true that in this life, many of the things we have done cannot be undone. Even though there is forgiveness, sometimes our sins have momentum.

But I’ll tell you this: we look forward to “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23). This is one of the ways the Bible speaks of the resurrection of the dead. The consequences of your sin might follow you in this life, but if you belong to Christ, they cannot follow you into the life to come. Jesus simply will not allow it.

And I’ll tell you this: there’s a difference between how we deal with sexual sins in the past, and how we deal with those in the future. And I suppose this is probably true for all types of sins, but today we’re dealing specifically with sexual sins. Concerning those that are in the future—or those that are *potentially* in the future—God’s Word gives an unequivocal “no.” Just don’t. “Flee from sexual immorality” (6:18). There’s no exception for consenting adults. There’s no provision for “As long as we really love each other.” The word from Scripture is, “Flee from sexual immorality.” There’s no gray area.

So we might expect that for those sexual sins in the past—the ones we’ve already committed—that we will be condemned for them. But that’s not what happens. The judgment from Scripture is, “You were bought with a price” (6:20). Or if we can back up to the last verse before our epistle lesson, we hear, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you

were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (6:11)

Concerning those sins in the past, God says, “You are forgiven.” But don’t use this forgiveness as an excuse to go on sinning. That’s not what this forgiveness is for.

We think of the woman caught in adultery who was brought to Jesus. This account is recorded in John 8. Jesus is both gracious and firm with her. The scribes and Pharisees bring a woman to Jesus who was caught in the act of adultery. It seems to be a setup—some kind of test to try to get Jesus to say or do the wrong thing. They ask Jesus what should be done with her. Jesus bent down and wrote something on the ground with his finger. Everyone who reads the story wants to know what Jesus wrote. But we just don’t know. God doesn’t reveal that to us. But one by one, everyone left—both the crowd who was just listening to Jesus teach and the accusers of the woman. Finally, it’s just Jesus and this woman standing there. So Jesus asks her, **“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”** (John 8:10) And she says, “No one, Lord” (John 8:11). So Jesus says, **“Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more”** (John 8:11).

Jesus is both gracious and firm. He forgives her unconditionally. But he does not excuse her, and he does not give her permission to go on sinning. In fact, he commands the opposite. He forgives unconditionally without compromising the slightest part of the Law.

So when you consider your own sins—whether they are sexual or otherwise—the same holds true for you. Jesus forgives you unconditionally. He does not hold your sins against you. They are forgiven. They were nailed to the cross in the flesh of Jesus, and they are no more. This means that you belong to Jesus. He is your Savior, and he is your Lord. So you are called now to go and sin no more. “For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.