

GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY

SERIES: UNDER THE CROSS



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1 Corinthians 6:12-20
Eighth Message
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1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Frederick Buechner writes of his first crush:

It was the upward-reaching and fathomlessly hungering, heart-breaking love for the beauty of the world at its most beautiful, and, beyond that, for that beauty east of the sun and west of the moon which is past the reach of all but our most desperate desiring and is finally the beauty of Beauty itself, of Being itself and what lies at the heart of Being . . .

And let anyone who dismisses such feelings as puppy love, silly love, be set straight because I suspect that rarely if ever again in our lives does Eros touch us in such a distilled and potent form as when we are children and have so little else in our hearts to dilute it.¹

Does Buechner give you language for what you long for—something “east of the sun and west of the moon,” something that seems past the reach of all but your “most desperate desiring”?

In both testaments, a male-female relationship in marriage mirrors God’s relationship with his people (Isaiah 54:5, Revelation 19:7-9). God is the husband; we are the wife. Christ is the bridegroom; we are the bride. God is romancing us.

What does this mean for us as members of God’s wife, as members of the bride of Christ, both married and single? Practically, it means a great deal. It has a great deal to do with what we do with our bodies.

A sentence in our text today is featured on the back wall of our worship center: “You are not your own, for you are bought with a price.” Today, we’ll see that jewel in its setting.

Instructive statements

1 Corinthians 6:12-14:

“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 or the LORD, and the LORD for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the LORD and will also raise us up by his power.

There are no quotation marks in Koine Greek, the language of the New Testament. However, the English Standard Version translators put quotation marks around certain phrases in verses 12 and 13, indicating that they believe that the apostle Paul is responding to some kind of saying.

If such is the case, then Paul would not be saying, “All things are lawful for me” or, “Food is meant for the stomach and stomach for the food.” In fact, it is also possible quotation marks should also be put around the last phrase in verse 13: “and God will destroy both one and the other.”² In any case, whether Paul is debunking or clarifying, three instructive statements emerge.

What’s helpful?

First, Paul says “not all things are helpful.” Even if something is lawful, or permissible, it may not be helpful.

When we start with the question, “What’s lawful?” are we asking what we can get away with? Are we asking where the line is so that we can get as close to it as possible without crossing it?

Instead, start with the question, “What’s helpful?” Live your life not based on what’s permissible but what’s helpful: what helps your relationship with the Lord and what helps others.

Second, Paul says “I will not be dominated by anything.” It is not helpful to be dominated by anything. After asking, “What’s helpful,” ask another question: “Am I being dominated in some way by things that are not helpful?”

After Cain killed his brother, the Lord told him that “sin is crouching at the door” and that “its desire is

contrary to you.” In other words, sin wants to dominate you, “but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:7).

What our bodies are meant for

Third, it does not follow that one should satisfy one’s desire for sex as one satisfies one’s desire for food: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” One does not need sex as one needs food. You need food to live, but you don’t need sex to live.

The noun translated “sexual immorality” covers any sexual relationship outside the marriage between a man and a woman. Paul has already condemned certain kinds of sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 5:1 and 6:10. In this passage, Paul will condemn another kind: sex with a prostitute.

If the body is not meant for sexual immorality, what is it meant for? It’s interesting that Paul does not say here, by contrast, that it is meant for a sexual relationship in marriage, even if he encourages married people to have sex in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. No, he says the body is “for the Lord.”

God has given us bodies, and he dwells in our bodies, so that they may serve the purposes of the Lord—that is, Christ. Such purposes may or may not include a sexual relationship in marriage for a particular time. Not only is the body for the Lord, but the Lord is also “for the body.” Jesus Christ, our Lord, believes our bodies are useful to him, no matter what shape they’re in. After all, he died for those bodies.

In fact, the Lord has eternal purposes for our bodies, because God, who raised the Lord from the dead, will also raise us from the dead, bodies and all.

What else do we need to know?

Mutually exclusive unions

1 Corinthians 6:15-17:

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.

When we believe in Jesus, we become one with him. We need to know that our bodies are members of Christ, part of his body. What happens then when a believer in Christ has sex with a prostitute? The imagery is horrifying. It’s like detaching a body part and attaching it to another body. And of course, it’s even more horrifying when considering the body it’s being detached from (Christ’s body) and the body it’s being attached to (a prostitute’s body). In fact, Paul reacts in horror: “Never!”

Indeed, in a sexual relationship, there’s more going on than the temporary mingling of two bodies. There’s no such thing as casual sex. When one has sex with a prostitute, one is “joined” to that person and even becomes “one body” with that person. Paul invokes the first marriage and Genesis 2:24: “The two shall become one flesh.” As such, a sexual relationship is reserved for marriage.

But again, the antithesis to sexual immorality is not a sexual relationship in marriage; it’s relationship with the Lord. Note application of the word “joined” first to union with a prostitute and second to union with the Lord. If you believe in Jesus, you are “joined” to him, not only in body but also in spirit: all of you. Shall you then become “joined” to a prostitute? Never! The two unions—union with Christ and union with a prostitute—are mutually exclusive.

What else do we need to know?

Glorify God

1 Corinthians 6:18-20:

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.

Paul, having inveighed against a specific kind of “sexual immorality,” now employs the general word again, referring to sexual immorality of all kinds. Although he supplies ample reasoning throughout 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 for resisting sexual immorality, in certain situations, it’s better not to think at all. Instead, run: “Flee from sexual immorality.”

When Potiphar's wife was propositioning Joseph, even catching him by his garment, he didn't deliberate with himself. Instead, "he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house" (Genesis 39:12).

It's quite possible that Paul is again quoting a slogan in verse 18, for he literally says, "Every sin [not every other sin] whatever a man commits is outside the body." Is every sin that we commit somehow outside the body? Perhaps. Perhaps not. In any case, sexual immorality is sin of a different sort: it is sin against one's own body. Moreover, sex outside of a husband-wife relationship violates the divine purpose of sex to reflect the relationship between God and his people.

Paul is not saying that sexual immorality is worse than other sins; he's just saying it's a different kind of sin. The worship of other gods is the worst of sins, for all sins proceed from it (Romans 1:18-32). In fact, the worship of other gods is likened to adultery in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is spiritual adultery.

There is a divine link between sex and worship. We need to know that the temple, which is where God was worshiped, is now both the church (1 Corinthians 6:16-17) and a believer's individual body, as Paul says here in verse 19. The Holy Spirit, from within our bodies, inspires worship, not least by crying out for an intimate, trusting relationship with God: "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6). Sexual immorality uniquely violates God's purpose for our bodies.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our bodies indicates that we belong to God. Indeed, you are not our own; you are God's. How did you get the Holy Spirit? He was given to you. On what basis? Ah, "you were bought with a price." What was the price? Nothing less than the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19, Revelation 5:9-10).

The first question in the Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563, is this: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" The answer is this: "That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."

If we've been bought with the price of the blood of Christ, then there is forgiveness for the sins of sexual immorality, for the blood of Christ "cleanses us from all sin," even sins against the body (1 John 1:7). Jesus offered the woman who had five husbands and who was living with a man who wasn't her husband living water (John 4). He also told the woman who was caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you; go and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11).

What then should we do with these bodies, redeemed by the blood of Christ and inhabited by the Holy Spirit? We should glorify God with them. More than that we should glorify God "in" them, where the Holy Spirit dwells. We do so not least by paying attention to the Spirit. To glorify God means to demonstrate his greatness.

How can we glorify God in our bodies? What's helpful, especially when welcoming the sexual desires without being dominated by them?

Pursue intimacy

Notice that in 1 Corinthians 6, the antithesis to sexual immorality is not a sexual relationship in marriage but an intimate relationship with the Lord. Our sexual desires show us how much we yearn to find ourselves and lose ourselves in the Lord.

Indeed, as Buechner says, our sexual desires represent the heart-breaking longing for something "east of the sun and west of the moon," something "past the reach of all but our most desperate desiring"—which is to say, God.

Therefore, pursue intimacy with the Lord. Whatever we feel we need, we don't really need it. If you are beset by illicit sexual desires, fight those desires with a better desire: the desire for Christ.

Single, married, or divorced, old or young, regardless of orientation, we need Christ—and a growing understanding of the greatness of knowing him, which transcends all desires. Elsewhere, Paul says, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

As you pursue intimacy with the Lord, you are glorifying God in your body, because you are demonstrating what you value, whether you experience what you want to experience or not.

The San Francisco 49ers, as an organization, value the Lombardi Trophy, which is given to winner of the Super Bowl. They've gotten close, especially close earlier this year, but they haven't won it in a long time. They're only 4-4 this year, but that's no matter; they will drag their bruised and battered bodies out on the field next Sunday as part of their quest to win the Lombardi Trophy. They are showing you what they value; they are glorifying the Lombardi Trophy, whether they win it or not.

We're only scratching the surface of how great it is to know the Lord. Therefore, keep scratching.

If you pursue intimacy with the Lord, you are not missing out, because you are pursuing what is more valuable than whatever you think you might be missing out on, and you will be rewarded—in part in this creation, in full in the new creation. Seek and you will find.

What an opportunity we have: the opportunity to pursue intimacy with our creator and redeemer.

Intense desire

I did not get married until I was forty-two years old (not for lack of trying!). I take it now that I met the right woman, Karen, at the right time. Before that time, there was no promise from God that such would be the case, which created an opportunity to pursue intimacy with the Lord.

Especially in my late thirties, I felt an intense desire to be married—and to be married with all that comes with it. However, as a follower of Jesus, I embraced, and endeavored to follow, the sexual ethic espoused in the Scriptures, which reserves a sexual relationship for marriage.

So, what did I do?

First, I embraced the desire for a woman, and for a sexual relationship with a woman, as God-given. I didn't fight it; I befriended it.

Second, I prayed. I prayed a lot. I poured out my heart to God. In pouring out my heart to God, something precious happened between God and me. I found James 4:8 to be true: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

Pursuing intimacy with God and pursuing marriage and not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are mutually reinforcing. They go hand in hand.

God created us as sexual beings with sexual desires to show us how much we want him.

Present your body

Second, to glorify God in your body, present your body—that is, your whole self—to the Lord. Twice in Romans 6 Paul urges us to present our bodies to God

(Romans 6:13, 19). Then, in Romans 12:1, he writes this: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Romans 12:1).

Is there anything more personal you have to give the Lord than your body? Besides, if you have been bought with a price and you are not your own, it's not your body anyway. Regardless of the shape it's in, and regardless of what you've done with it, present your body to God. Then watch what he does.

I pray this, or something like it, every morning: "I present myself to you. Make me aware of you throughout the day, your presence and your direction."

What do you want to do with the life?

Charlie Luce was a longtime elder of this church. When I first started as a pastor here more than thirty years ago, Charlie, though he had retired from the board, was still part of the church. Charlie was a widower: his beloved wife had died several years earlier.

After she died, Charlie approached the Lord with the question, "What do you want to do with the life?" That's what he called his life: the life. Charlie discerned that the Lord wanted him to encourage younger men, and that's exactly what he did for the rest of his life, for the next twenty years or so, up until his death in 2013. In fact, on his death bed in the hospital, with the final breaths that emerged from his failing body, he was literally encouraging a younger man.

Not long after I arrived at PBC, Charlie invited me over to his house in Half Moon Bay for lunch. What do you think he did? He encouraged me, of course.

Charlie presented his body to the Lord. The Lord accepted his offering and used his offering for his glorious purposes. Charlie offered himself to the Lord, and the Lord took him up on the offer. Charlie glorified God in his body.

A poem emerges

Glorify God in your body: Pursue intimacy with him, and present your body to him.

Funmilayo Adeeye, a member of our church, wrote a poem based on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Here's how it came about, she says:

On Friday, I was randomly watching videos on YouTube to relax after a stressful week. Then I came across a video where two young ladies (one married and the other not married) were discussing celibacy and the struggle of sexual purity when you are in the single phase. It was a video that acknowledged the struggle while also providing practical ways to make it easier. I didn't think much of it as I enjoy watching random discussion videos anyway.

On Saturday morning however, during my devotion, the Holy Spirit was speaking to me about certain things and then he touched on the topic of sexual purity. The Bible references were 1 Corinthians 6:2-20 and 1 Corinthians 7:23.

And then I started writing into my jotter, reaffirming those words as they came to me. It wasn't until I finished writing it that I realized it was in a poem format.

Here's Funmilayo's poem:

I AM NOT OF MY OWN
I WAS BOUGHT AT A PRICE

MY BODY IS NOT OF MY OWN
IT IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLYSPIRIT

THE HOLYSPIRIT IS OF GOD
THE GIFT UNTO ME
A GIFT FROM GOD MY FATHER

HE LIVES INSIDE OF ME
THE GIFT OF GOD LIVES IN ME
THE THIRD PERSON OF GOD LIVES INSIDE
OF ME.

I THEREFORE CANNOT ACT HOWEVER.
FOR IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE
BUT GOD IN ME.

AND IF GOD BE IN ME
WHY WOULD I DESECRATE HIS DWELLING
PLACE?
FOR IF I DESECRATE HIS DWELLING PLACE,
MY BODY, HIS TEMPLE
HE WOULD HAVE NO PLACE IN ME.

FOR WHEN I SIN AGAINST MY BODY,
I TRULY DO NOT ONLY SIN AGAINST MY BODY,
I SIN AGAINST GOD'S DWELLING PLACE.

AND WHEN I SIN AGAINST HIS DWELLING
PLACE,
I MAKE THE HOLYSPIRIT OF GOD HOMELESS
I MAKE HIM SUFFER.
I SUFFER A VERY GIFT ENTRUSTED TO ME
BY GOD
GOD MY FATHER

A GIFT PRECIOUS TO GOD,
A GIFT THAT SHOULD BE PRECIOUS TO ME.
A GIFT THAT IS GOD.

THIS BODY IS TRULY NOT MY OWN, BUT OF
GOD
FOR I WAS BOUGHT AT A PRICE
THE PRICELESS PRICE OF THE BLOOD OF
JESUS CHRIST
THE SON OF GOD,
GOD MY FATHER.

Endnotes

1. Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey: A Memoir of Early Days* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco), 52.
2. How can it be said that God will destroy the stomach and food when Paul says that God will "raise us up by his power"? If he will raise us up, will he raise us up without stomachs?