

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NRSV)*

<sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup>For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

*1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 51-53 (NRSV)*

<sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup>for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

<sup>51</sup>Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

*Our bodies matter. How we treat them. What we do with them. How we even think of them. Our bodies matter far more than we know.*

The Christians in Corinth, Greece, were an over-spiritualized bunch. As they experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit, regrettably, they soon came to see our physical bodies as no more than an external casing for what really matters, our souls. After all, our bodies are often weak and diseased. They age. Some of our bodily functions are not spoken of in polite company. And, they believed, someday our bodies will stop working, freeing our souls to go to the heavenly places. So, they concluded, what we do with our bodies in this life doesn't really matter. What counts is our spiritual quest.

The Corinthian Christians could not have been more wrong. Paul's lengthy letter, *1 Corinthians*, is largely devoted to helping the Corinthians see that their elevation of all things spiritual and their diminishing of all things physical was deeply un-Christian.

*God's Good Creation*

In the Genesis creation accounts, God creates all that there is and pronounces it good. The earth, the stars, the plants, the animals, the humans. It is all good. How could it be otherwise? The tragedies of illness and pain and death creep in only after the humans distrust God and do the one thing God had told them not to do. In the biblical view, God's physical creation is in need of redemption, but it is still inherently good.

And in God's creation, the humans are created as whole persons, integrated totalities. We are not simply a "soul" encased by flesh and bones. We are a wholeness. The Corinthians believed that the only part of themselves that mattered was their spiritual part – as if one can neatly pull apart the physical and the spiritual. But we can't.

*"Members of Christ" (6:15)*

Not only is each Corinthian an integrated whole of flesh and spirit, each is also part of the body of Christ. A foot, a leg, an eye, an ear as Paul describes it later in the letter. Thus, they are all bound together in deep union with Jesus and with one another. Everything that the Corinthians do has to be considered within that context. As we'll see shortly, this leads to some surprising perspectives.

*Bought with a price (6:20)*

Further, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the bodies they see as being fleeting and trivial do not even belong to them. They have been bought by God. "You are not your own," Paul writes. How different this is from the popular culture of today, consumed as it is with "rights," "autonomy," "self-determination," and so on. I don't own me, God owns me. And the price God paid was higher than I could imagine paying for anyone or anything – the willing death of God's own son.

## *Resurrected bodies*

Not only are we integrated wholes of body and spirit bound to Christ and to one another, but our bodies are not as fleeting as they seem. The climax of Paul's letter is his great chapter on the resurrection. The Corinthians are wrong to deny the resurrection of the body, Christ's or our own. As Christ was raised, Paul writes, so shall we be raised. Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection (15:23), not the only fruit. It isn't that our resurrected bodies will be the same as our present bodies, but they will be physical as Jesus' resurrected body was physical. Jesus could walk, talk, eat, and be touched. As with Jesus, there is continuity between our "now" bodies" and our "then" bodies. God's redemptive work is about the restoration of God's physical creation, not its abandonment.

## *The mystery of sex*

All this and more must be brought to bear on Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6. When we strive to read Scripture well, context always matter. Often it is essential. The

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1 Corinthians</b></p> <p>Corinth, near Athens in southern Greece, was founded in 44BC by Julius Caesar as a colony for Roman veterans. By the time of Paul, Corinth had grown to be a large, commercial port with a reputation as a rough, wild town. Paul first visited Corinth in about 50AD on his second missionary journey. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is responding to a letter(s) that he has received from Corinth, detailing significant problems in the young church. At this time, Christian churches met in the public areas of private homes. Many of the Christians would have been illiterate, so Paul's letters were read aloud and circulated among the homes where Christians met to worship.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>(continued in the page three textbox)</i></p>	<p>immediate context of today's passage is that a member of the Corinthian church has been visiting a prostitute.</p> <p>Doesn't the man realize, Paul writes, that sexual union with the prostitute creates "one flesh" (6:16). Again, in keeping with the Genesis creation accounts, sex is, as Eugene Peterson puts it, "as much spiritual mystery as physical union." There is nothing casual or trivial about sex. It creates more than babies.</p> <p>Further, Paul writes, doesn't the man realize that because he is bound to the body of Christ, each person in the body is then bound to the prostitute, by virtue of the man's sexual union with the prostitute (6:17).</p> <p>If all this makes your head swim a bit, you are not alone. Confronting the Christian worldview and all its implications requires the transformation of our minds, an enormous conversion of our moral imagination.</p>
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## *God's Temple*

Paul's last point in this passage takes the most imagination of all.

You and I don't have much experience with temples, so we aren't shocked by Paul's claim in 6:19 – but we need to be. The temple in Jerusalem was the dwelling place of God, where God was present with his people in a way that God was not present elsewhere. Centuries earlier, Ezekiel had brought terrifying visions of God's presence leaving the temple before its destruction by the Babylonians.

Thus, by claiming that these troubled, weak, confused Corinthians are God's temple, Paul is claiming that each of them is the place of God's renewed presence. Earlier in this letter, Paul asserted that the church, as a body, is God's temple (3:16-17) as well. Thus, whether as individuals or as the church, we, like the Corinthians, are the place of God's presence. If you want to see a holy place some time, don't take a trip, look in a mirror.

That rather changes one's notion of who we really are and who is with us in all things and at all times. I guess if your idea of God is someone who is keeping a list of the "naughty" and "nice," Paul's imagery might be frightening. And, frankly, when we engage in unholy behaviors, it probably should be. But when we rightly embrace God as active and caring and loving in our lives, God's presence is comforting and encouraging and strengthening.

Glorifying God with our bodies, our whole selves, is certainly about eating well and exercising regularly, but it is about far more. We need to learn reverence for God's presence in and with us. Where do I go? What do I do? I can't escape God. Why should I want to?

## 1 Corinthians (continued from the page two textbox)

### Problems in Corinth

Why did Paul write this letter? Evidently, Paul has a pretty long list of problems in the churches in Corinth. Interpreting 1 Corinthians would be easier if we had the letters to which Paul was responding – so we have to be careful how we handle portions of the letter. Overall, there were four overarching problems in the Corinthian church:

- Major divisions in the Corinthian church (chapters 1-4 & 6)
- Disputes about major ethical problems (chapters 7-10)
- Instances of flagrant immorality (chapters 5 & 6)
- Problems in the worship services, driven by the efforts of some members to demonstrate their spiritual superiority (chapters 11-14)

Paul works through all these problems, one by one. As you read through his admonitions and advice, remember that Paul's vocation was to go throughout the Gentile world founding colonies of a new human race – all those born anew in Jesus Christ. Paul's instructions are always aimed at strengthening the Christian community and spreading the word. Thus, Paul encourages those activities and behaviors that build up the community or are a good witness to non-Christians and he prohibits those that tear down the community or are a poor witness to outsiders.

For example, in chapters 12-14 Paul writes about speaking in tongues and other problems in worship. He doesn't prohibit speaking in tongues, he simply wants order brought to the church. He says that if a person speaks in tongues then someone else must interpret it, otherwise how can it build up the community of faith. He says that only two or three people may speak in tongues, in order, at a worship service. Why? Because, if too many do so, chaos will ensue and non-Christians will think these Christians are crazy! He also cautions that speaking in tongues is not a sign of spiritual superiority and must not be the basis for divisions in the church. Notice that Paul's famous chapter on love (chapter 13) falls right in the middle of his discussion of spiritual gifts. It is love for which we are to strive, not some sort of supposed spiritually superior experience! We are all one in Christ Jesus and we share among us many spiritual gifts that we are to use to build up the body of Christ.

## READING WITH HEART & MIND, MAY 13 – MAY 20

**Sunday, Acts 15:1-35** The Christian leadership meets in Jerusalem to consider whether incoming Gentile converts must be circumcised to be a Christian. Why do you think this is such a big deal? What does the council decide?

**Monday, Acts 15:36-16:40** Paul leaves for his second missionary journey. Why doesn't Barnabas go with him? Who tells Paul to cross westward into Macedonia? Why? Note the prominent role of Lydia in Philippi. Why might Luke think it important to tell us this story? What do you think brings the jailer to faith in Jesus Christ?

**Tuesday, Acts 17** Why do you think there is so much trouble every time Paul preaches among the Jews? Why does he go to them first? When Paul preached in Athens, how does it differ from his preaching to the Jews? Why?

**Wednesday, Acts 18:1-23** How long does Paul spend in Corinth? What couple does he meet there? Why are the Roman authorities disinterested in the charges against Paul?

**Thursday, Acts 18:24-19:41** Paul returns home, while Priscilla and her husband stay on in Ephesus. What do they teach Apollos about the Christian message? What does this story tell you about the role of women in the early church? Chapter 19 begins Paul's third missionary journey. Why are there riots in Ephesus over Paul? Who feels threatened by him?

**Friday, Acts 20** Why does Paul have to double-back through Macedonia? Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders is his only speech to Christians in the book of Acts. How would you summarize it? What are two or three key points?

**Saturday, Acts 21:1-26** Why are Paul's friends fearful for him on his return to Jerusalem? What do you think is the significance of the purification rite? Why would Paul agree to undergo it? Do you think he believes it is a necessary part of the faith?

## Sermon Notes

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### **Scott Engle's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.**

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. Whether you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at [sengle@standrewacademy.org](mailto:sengle@standrewacademy.org).

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

This sermon series is about ending up somewhere on purpose, not by accident. How can we hope to go anywhere worthwhile on purpose unless we understand better who and whose we really are? And surely, taking care of ourselves physically is part of this. When I neglect my body I risk taking myself out of this life and this work prematurely. Last week, we saw that the Israelites took themselves out of the game because of their fears and anxieties. Obesity can do the same thing. How might this perspective change the stakes when it comes to staying fit and healthy?

It is from God that we learn who we are and even what we are to do with the life we are given. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians in the *New Interpreters Bible*, J. Paul Sampley writes:

“In our individualistic society and culture, Paul’s claim that ‘you are not your own’ (6:19) will seem decidedly alien. Are we not in charge of our own lives? Can we not do as we see fit? Our own self-control is a fiction that we struggle to maintain. For Paul, and indeed for everyone in his time, nobody was without a master, a lord to whom they were in some measure responsible. . . . Paul’s anthropology, his understanding of human nature, emerges here: All people are dependent on some being or some thing beyond themselves to give them meaning and significance (cf. Rom 14:7). So for Paul the issue is not whether one has a lord or not . . . At stake is what lord one will have. Paul has taken as his model the contemporary practice of buying and selling slaves in the marketplace: ‘you were bought.’ And, because slaves were supposed to increase their owners’ honor, to make their owners look good, Paul transposes the slave’s need to honor the owner into his own theological concepts and tells the Corinthians how to honor their new owner: ‘glorify God in your body’ (6:20). In Paul’s categories, the chief competing lords are sin, a power that takes over one’s life and governs it (and a power that Paul thinks was the former lord of all believers; cf. Rom 3:23), or Christ, whose lordship grants perfect freedom.”

Who is your Lord, sin or Christ or . . . ? What does it mean to claim Jesus as Lord? What does it look like to live it? How can we glorify God with our bodies? How do we bring shame on God with our bodies?