

Temples of the Holy Spirit

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

February 12, 2023 PM Sermon

Reverend Peter Jonker

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

When we read these 8 verses, we are entering into the middle of a debate between Paul and the church of Corinth. The debate is about sex. Paul and the leaders of the Corinthian church are arguing about the sorts of sexual practices that should be allowed for Christians. We are, of course, only hearing one side of the debate. We get Paul's forceful reply to some of the things they have been saying to him. Paul is strongly countering their arguments. Specifically, the debate seems to be about going to prostitutes. This is hard to fathom from our modern perspective, but apparently many members of the Corinthian church, including many of the leaders, are arguing that it is no big deal if a follower of Jesus Christ visits a prostitute. In Corinth, spending time with a prostitute was not the societal taboo it is today. It was as socially acceptable as getting a haircut, or going out to eat. Many of the members of the church had engaged in such practices before they became Christians and they didn't really want to stop. 'It should be allowed,' they argued, 'It should be accepted. We should be open-minded about such things!'

The Corinthian church didn't just create this opinion out of thin air. They had reasons for this belief and Paul actually quotes three of their arguments in our passage: First the Corinthians argued: 'I should be allowed to visit prostitutes because I have the right to do anything!!' We are free in Christ. We're not under law any more, we're people of grace. All that legalism and guilt were washed away by Jesus, so no more judgmentalism!

Second, the Corinthians also said, "I should be allowed to visit prostitutes because food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food." Which sounds like a strange thing to say, but what they mean is that sex is just an appetite, and going to a prostitute is simply about feeding that appetite. When you're physically hungry, you go to the cupboard and make yourself a peanut butter sandwich. When you're sexually hungry you go to the brothel. What's the big deal? None of this has anything to do with your Spiritual life or your Christian commitment. It doesn't mean I don't love Jesus. I'm just hungry! Food for the Stomach, the stomach for food. Sex for the body, the body for sex.

And last, I think Paul also quotes the Corinthian argument in verse 18 when it says, "All sins that a person commits are outside the body." Sin has nothing to do with the body, claimed the Corinthians. Sin is a matter of the Spirit. Sin is a spiritual category, and so what you do with your body is irrelevant. It's your business. It's your choice. Do whatever you want with your body, just make sure and keep your spirit clean.

Paul is obviously frustrated with their attitude. He's alarmed and a little angry. 'You think going to a prostitute has nothing to do with your Spirit? Don't you know that when you go to a prostitute you are united with her, and not just on a physical level?! You think the things you do with your body have nothing to do with your Spiritual life? Don't you realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?' The Corinthians want split Body and spirit as far apart as possible so that they can continue some of their old practices. Paul wants to bring body and Spirit close together as possible. He wants to say that the things that you do with your body have everything to do with your spirit. The Corinthians want to create a God free zone in their life, a piece of neutral ground where they can do whatever they like. A place where they're not answerable to God. Paul is saying, there is no such thing as a God-free zone.

I can't imagine anyone in this church or frankly anyone in any of the churches I know trying to make an argument that visiting prostitutes is OK. But I can imagine Christians today having roughly the same attitude as the Corinthians. I can imagine modern Christians trying to carve out God-free zones in their life where they can do as they please. People, my self included, often carve out activities in our life and talk about them as if they are really just fun, and don't have anything to do with our spiritual commitment. 'You like horror movies? Cool. You listen to Sports radio during the day and watch the game every night. Cool. You spend hundreds of dollars on clothes every month? Whatever makes you happy. You like to hit the casinos regularly? It's just fun. You don't physically come to church all summer while you're at the cottage? Hey it doesn't mean you don't love Jesus. You like to have 2 or 3 drinks every night to wind down? You're an adult and your allowed. Isn't it

great to live in 2023 where we don't have all those silly legalistic taboos anymore? No drinking, no dancing, no movie going, no card playing. I'm glad we all understand Christian freedom.' No one is arguing to visit prostitutes anymore, but all of us, myself included, all of us have these areas where, consciously or subconsciously, we try to create a God-free zone.

Based on the way he reacts to the Corinthians and their attempts to visit prostitutes, I think Paul would be deeply uncomfortable with this modern attitude. The fact is everything we do in this body, everything we do in this body, has an effect on our spirit. We know this. We know that there is a strong connection between the physical and the Spiritual, between our bodies and our spirits. For example: Remember how little sunshine we had the first two weeks of January? Do you remember how grey everything was? How did that make your Spirit feel? What did living under this huddled mass of grey do to our spirits. Not good, right? And by way of contrast when we had two straight days of sunshine this weekend, what happened to your Spirit. It felt great didn't it? People were out of their homes, they were walking around and everyone was smiling. The sun didn't just feel good on our faces; it felt good in our hearts, in our spirits!

This connection between body and spirit shows up in science. In a really interesting study, it showed how weight can affect our judgments. A group of volunteers were asked to evaluate the resumes of supposed job applicants. They were given the same resumes to evaluate, but some of the resumes were on cheap light clipboards, and some of them had their resume on a heavy, more substantial clipboard. For the same candidate with the same resume, the people with the heavier clipboards had a more positive impression than the people with the lighter keyboards. Almost like the candidate seemed weightier and more substantial. The physical affected the mind, the spirit.

Or think about how grief is tied to the body. You've lost a loved one and you are sad, but most of the time you keep your sadness inside. You function. You do your errands, do your job. But then you meet a friend, a good friend, and she says, I'm so sorry and she gives you a hug and asks you how you're doing. You start to talk and what happens?? The emotions release. You can't help it. The physicality of the hug and the physical act of talking about your loss affect your Spirit.

I can think of no human physical action that doesn't have some impact on the spirit. Everything we do in this body and with our bodies matters. Everything we do in our bodies and with our bodies has a spiritual component. The movies we choose to see. The clothes we choose to wear. The homes we choose to buy. The cars we choose to drive. The way we choose to drive them. The vacations we choose to take. The way we snack. The things we drink. All of it touches our spirit in some way. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis says that every decision we make either moves us closer to our God, closer to the Sun of righteousness, or moves us further away "into the cold and darkness of utmost space." It all matters.

Paul knows this, and he is so concerned we get his point that he makes it three different ways. "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit!" he says. And that is the opposite of saying your body is a container for the Holy Spirit. A container is something dispensable. When you go to Starbucks to get your coffee, you get it in a little paper cup. You drink your coffee and then you throw the container away. You recycle it. You don't need it anymore. A temple is something that not only contains the holy, it is itself Holy. Its ground and its walls are Holy. Think of the ark in the Old Testament and how carefully this physical object was treated. God's glory wasn't just inside the ark, the ark itself was glorious and you had to be very careful how you handled it! To call our bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit is to make the connection between the physical and the Spiritual as close as it can be.

Paul also says, "God raised the Lord from the dead and he will raise us also." Paul points to the resurrection to show how much God cares about the life of the body. God didn't just raise the spiritual part of Jesus into some disembodied afterlife, he raised him up body and soul. It is not just our souls that God wants to recreate, it's our bodies too. People who celebrate the resurrection are people who care about all the aspects of physical life.

And finally Paul says, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price." Most obviously that tells us that we aren't free to do whatever we want with our bodies because they belong to God and we are accountable to him. We do not own our bodies, we belong, body and soul, to him. Paul's message to us: everything you do in your body is important, everything you do in your body matters, everything has spiritual weight.

I am aware when I follow Paul's words here and make the claim that every action is full of significance, that everything we do in the body either takes us closer to God or moves us further away, it can feel a little overwhelming. If everything matters, then I have to be ready and focused all the time! If everything is important, then I need to make sure I get everything right. You can imagine this mindset leading to a new kind of legalism. If everything matters we better have rules about everything and make sure everybody follows them, because otherwise we will be heading towards that 'darkness of utmost space' that Lewis talks about. Do we need to go back to the days when we had rules for everything? Card playing, movies, skirt lengths, dancing? Do we want to go back to the day when we said, no throwing a baseball on the Sabbath?

No we don't. Although, let me say a couple of things about that. While those rules were often misguided, at least they recognized the significance of life in the body. At least they understood that everything we do has spiritual import and that all of life is sacred. But often they did that in a way that made the body bad. When the rules of old said 'no riding your bike on the Sabbath,' or 'no throwing a baseball,' they made it seem like the only God glorifying thing you could do with this body of yours is to sit still, cease all physical action and motion, and read the Bible, or maybe the Banner. Almost like God was most glorified when your body is least engaged. They knew that the body was spiritual, but they acted as if bodily enjoyment of life could only have pernicious effects.

But if God were so uninterested in the Body, why would he send his son to be born a human being, living a life in a human body? If God just wanted our spiritual thoughts and spiritual devotion, why would he bother to resurrect Jesus' body as well as his spirit? Given what Paul says here about the goodness of our bodies and the spiritual importance of the body, I would argue that riding a bike or throwing a baseball or taking a long hike with good friends are the perfect form of Sabbath recreation. Enjoying the gifts of body and soul out in the glory of creation, giving thanks to God for the goodness of embodied life. Which is really good.

Earlier I talked about how Paul says that our bodies were bought with a price, and I made the point that there is a restrictive side to that; we can't just do whatever we want with our bodies. But it's not just a restriction; it's first and foremost a word of grace. You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Think about what that means: Here I am, me, Peter Jonker. Skinny guy. Ordinary looking. Carrying a few insecurities. Late middle age. Honestly getting close to my sell by date. Early onset arthritis. Knees starting to go bad. Imagine there was a people aisle at some enormous cosmic supermarket and all of humanity was on display. Six billion people neatly lined up, and someone could push their grocery cart down that aisle and browse the goods. I don't feel like someone coming by with a shopping cart would stop in front of me and say, "Now there's a healthy specimen! There's a keeper! I'm buying him!"

But Paul tells us that we were all bought with a price! You might not feel like much of a bargain. Your container might be damaged. Your seal may be broken. You may feel like that overripe bunch of bananas in the grocery store. The brown spots are starting to show and you know no one is going to choose them when there are so many other bunches that still have that nice fresh yellow tinged with a little green. You may feel just like those sad bananas. But Jesus stops in front of you and says, "I want that one. I want him. I want her." "Are you sure?" "Yes I'm sure" "He's in bad shape and frankly he's not cheap." "That's OK. I'll pay whatever it takes."

I am not my own, but belong, body and soul to my faithful savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood. I have been bought with a price so that from now on, with my body and my soul, I can live wholeheartedly for him.