



# 1 CORINTHIANS

## 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

### INTRODUCTION

Though Paul has already addressed sexual immorality in chapter 5, his main emphasis there was not so much on the sin itself but how the church should respond to the man sleeping with his stepmother. In this section, Paul addresses sexual immorality more broadly, urging the church to flee from it and to glorify God with their bodies.

### MAIN POINT

The Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should use our bodies to glorify God and rid ourselves of sexual immorality.

### REFLECT

Like all Christians, the Corinthians were influenced by their surrounding culture, especially so when it came to how they viewed their bodies. "The body," according to one Greek proverb, "is a tomb." Another said, "I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse." David Prior observes that such a negative view of the body can lead to two very different responses: treat your physical appetites as bad and control them as much as possible, or give yourself fully to them since the body can't affect your soul.<sup>i</sup>

Many in the church took the latter approach, believing that they were free in Christ to visit Corinth's many temple prostitutes. To them, sex was as natural and morally neutral as eating, and since our stomachs point to our need of food, so our anatomy, they reasoned, points to our need of sexual gratification. "Since what I do with my body doesn't touch my spirit, what's the harm? Besides, God's just going to destroy my body in the end, so what I do with it can't have any lasting value."

The Corinthians' thinking can be summed up in two maxims: "All things are lawful for me" and "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food". To the first, Paul gives two clarifications. Christians are indeed "free in Christ", but just because we have the right to do something doesn't mean we should. Paul wants the members of this church to build each other up (3:14-15; 14:12), and thus they must use their freedom to serve one another, not pursue their own desires. This leads to his second qualification: in the pursuit of our desires, it's all too easy to become enslaved to them. Any lawful things that end up enslaving us are actually unlawful.

Paul spends considerable time responding to their second maxim. First off, he reminds them that God will resurrect their bodies. Secondly, there is a world of difference, he says, between food and sex. Food is eaten, digested, and expelled. It affects our bodies, and that's about it. Sex on the other hand affects a person not just physically, but psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally as well. It encompasses the whole person. This inseparable link between the body and spirit in sex is why Paul can say that becoming one in *body* with a prostitute is incompatible with being one in *spirit* with Christ (vv. 15-17).

In contrast to the prevailing belief at the time that the body was just a shell for the soul, Paul concludes this section by saying that the Christian's body has the dignity of being a temple where God's Spirit dwells. This not only underscores the command to flee sexual immorality but also the need to use our bodies to pursue holiness and glorify God in all areas of our lives.

- Does the church today have any maxims like those the Corinthians had (vv. 12-13)? In what ways do we abuse them?
- How does this passage challenge our own culture's thinking on sexuality?
- When do you find yourself tempted by sexual immorality? What does it look like practically to "flee"?

## MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – *"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, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."*

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<sup>i</sup> David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, p. 95