**HONOR GOD WITH YOUR BODY**

***1 Corinthians 6:1-20***

***“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (vs. 19-20).***

Thus far, Paul has dealt with problems of division and a specific case of sexual immorality in the Corinthian church. In today’s passage he addresses lawsuits between believers and deals with immorality, especially sexual immorality, in depth. By handling these matters, Paul ultimately teaches us to honor God with our bodies. Through today’s study, let’s learn why and how to honor God with our bodies.

1. **Why not rather be wronged? (vs. 1-11)**

Look at verse 1. ***“If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord’s people?”*** Whenever people live together, there are disputes. So nations and states have established court systems. In Corinth, there was a highly developed legal system based on Roman law, and lawsuits were common. In early U.S. history, civil lawsuits were somewhat rare; now they are as common as drinking coffee. Various lawsuits are ongoing, and civil lawsuits cost the U.S. economy hundreds of billions of dollars each year.

However, Christians should be different—not because Christians never get into disputes, but because we handle disputes differently. In verse 1, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for taking their disputes to civil courts instead of resolving them in the church. They did not know that the Lord’s people are the most qualified judges. Christians learn the mind of Christ and grow in spiritual insight to see things from God’s point of view. When Jesus comes again, he will share his power and glory with his people in judging the world and even angels (Mt 19:28; 2Ti 2:12; Rev 20:4).

In verses 4-5, Paul counsels the Corinthians to appoint judges or arbiters from among believers to settle disputes in the church. Exodus 18:21 gives us good criteria for an arbiter. He must fear God, be trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain. Then both sides must respect the decision of the arbiter and be willing to settle the matter based on Biblical truth.

Read verse 7. ***“The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?”*** When Christians fight with each other, who wins? Satan wins. Satan shrieks with sadistic joy and becomes the head cheerleader to stir up more fighting. His delight is to destroy the church. The church is the body of Christ (Eph 5:23). Unbelievers can see, touch, smell, and experience the invisible Christ through the visible church. By stirring up disputes, quarreling, fighting, and divisions among believers, however, Satan wants to defame Jesus’ name and keep unbelievers from approaching God. God raised his church to exalt his name and witness about Christ to the world. In doing so, the church brings many perishing souls to Christ and spreads the kingdom of God. But instead of honoring God, if the church is used by Satan to dishonor God, she is totally defeated, and it is so lamentable to God.

So Paul strongly encourages the Corinthian Christians, ***“Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?”*** As the children of God, we must yield, though we are wronged or cheated. Perhaps, being unjustly misunderstood by others is one of the most difficult things for any human being to endure. It is our human nature to prove our own innocence to others as much as possible. Each of us wants to say, “I am right, and you are wrong,” or “you may be right, but I am also right.” How can we overcome such human nature, keep unity in the church and honor God even by being wronged and cheated? We can find the answer in our Lord’s example.

Jesus was sinless without any defect (Heb 4:15). But we wicked human beings beat, flogged, and nailed him to a cross out of our ignorance and greed. But Jesus did not open his mouth. Before the crowd, he was naked and lifted up in the midst of two criminals as if he were the worst criminal. We sneered at the crucified Jesus to come down from the cross and prove his innocence. He could have come down from the cross immediately and shown his innocence by punishing the sinful and rebellious creatures. But he silently endured all the terrible scorns, shame and pains. Isaiah 53:6-7 explains about the meaning of Jesus’ suffering and silence: *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”* Jesus was wronged and cheated by sinners, but he silently took the mistreatment and misunderstanding to save sinners.

Before his last breath, Jesus called out with a loud voice, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46).* He entrusted himself unto God’s justice. God vindicated Jesus and proved his righteousness by raising him from the dead on the third day. Jesus opened a new and living way for any sinners to approach God based on his righteousness (Heb 10:20). Through Jesus’ silent sufferings, God purchased sinners and made them as Jesus’ own body, the church. Jesus loves his church whom he gave himself up for (Eph 5:25b). Now he wants all the members of his body to love one another by following in his footsteps, even if it means being wronged, mistreated, and cheated for his honor. In doing so, Jesus wants to be glorified through his body. Apostle Paul himself also confesses that he loved the body of Christ, and willingly suffered and participated in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body (Col 1:24). So he urges us to love the body of Christ for the honor of God. God is the perfect Judge, he knows each person’s heart and he will vindicate us in the end, although we are wronged and cheated for his honor. God wants us to fully trust in his perfect justice. Those who “choose to lose” for Christ please God and win the ultimate victory.

In verses 9-10, Paul clearly warns the Corinthians that believers must live in a way that is markedly different from unbelievers. Paul lists the sins that were widely practiced in pagan society. He declares that people who continue to live in such sins cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Look at verse 11. ***“And that is what some of you were. 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.”*** Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that they were once a part of the sinful world, but God washed their sins with the precious blood of Christ and made them holy children of God and citizens of the kingdom of God. We must remember this sin-forgiving grace and our new identity in Christ.

When we truly know this grace, then we can maintain a new way of living, forgiving and loving each other. According to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18, each of us was a debtor who owed 10,000 bags of gold to God, impossible to pay back by any means with our own efforts. But God took pity on us and generously canceled the countless debts at the price of Jesus’ sacrifice (Mt 18:23-27). So now we can willingly cancel our brothers and sisters’ trivial debts, even by being wronged and cheated. May God bless our church to honor God by willingly embracing others, suffering for each other in Christ’s love and growing together as the eternal body of Christ!

1. **Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (vs. 12-20)**

In this part, Paul turns his attention to the individual Christian life. Look at verse 12. ***“‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but I will not be mastered by anything.”*** The phrase, ***“I have the right to do anything”*** seemed to be a popular slogan of the times like today’s “If it feels good, do it.” Some Corinthian Christians used it to justify continuing in their old sinful lifestyles. Paul refutes their misuse of our freedom in Christ by pointing out that not everything is beneficial. If one uses his freedom to sin, he becomes a slave to sin again. True freedom can be enjoyed only in the truth when we obey the teachings of Christ (Jn 8:32).

Look at verse 13. ***“You say, ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.’ The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”*** The phrase ***“Food for the stomach and the stomach for food”*** was another popular saying of the Corinthians that justified gratifying their physical desires of any kind including sexual immorality. This came from the Greek philosophy of dualism, which claimed that the spirit was good and immortal, while all matter, including the body, was evil and mortal. So many held the idea that since the body was evil anyway, they could indulge in any kind of sinful behavior, and it would not affect their spirit. This view led people to a distorted view of humanity and morality. God created the material world for good, and he created mankind in body and spirit so that we might have eternal life both in body and spirit. Christ came in a body and he gave it as an atoning sacrifice for our sins so that both our spirits and bodies may be saved and have eternal life (14). Though the Corinthian Christians had accepted the gospel, their Greek worldview was deeply ingrained in them.

In verse 13b, Paul goes on to correct their wrong view of the body: ***“The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”*** Christ redeemed our whole man so that our whole man might belong to him. Our body cannot be separated from our mind and spirit. Christ wants to dwell in our whole being—in body, mind and spirit. In fact, Christ indwells each of his people through the Spirit, so our bodies are his members (15a). It is therefore unthinkable to unite the members of Christ with a prostitute. It is like trying to unite holiness and sinfulness together. But some Corinthians thought that free sex was like eating a good meal to their bodies. Paul corrects them by explaining the nature of sex from God’s word in Genesis 2:24, ***“Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’”*** Sex is a special God-given gift that produces a mysterious union. Sex is more than physical contact; it is also emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. One can eat a good meal and forget about it several hours later. However, no one can just forget about a sexual partner. This is why the gift of sex must be used rightly. It is given by God to be enjoyed between one man and one woman within the bounds of marriage. On the other hand, if we misuse the gift of sex, our whole life is distorted.

Like the Corinthians, today sex is incredibly misused in our culture. People’s attitude about sexuality has changed drastically in the last 50 years. According to the Roper Center at Cornell University, in 1969, 21% of people thought that pre-marital sex was permissible. In a recent survey in 2014, 73% of people said that sex before marriage is acceptable. This changed view of morality has resulted in divorce rates of 50% (2017), and nearly 20 million new STIs occur every year in this country, half of those among young people aged 15–24 (CDC). This is a tremendously serious issue in our culture today. How can we overcome the ungodly culture and use our bodies for God’s purpose?

First, we must flee from sexual immorality. Read verse 18. ***“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.”*** Here sexual immorality pertains to any type of sexual expression outside of the biblically defined marriage relationship (Mt 19:4-5). It includes premarital sex, homosexuality, or watching pornography. Apostle Paul points out that it is not just a sin against another person, but also a sin against oneself. Warnings against its serious consequences abound in the Bible. It destroys the spirit, mind and body (Ps 38:5-8, 51:3); it destroys purity, honor and reputation; it destroys our homes.

How can we avoid sexual immorality? Run away from it! Compared to the past, we are much more easily exposed to the temptation of sexual immorality today due to the developments of the internet and smart phones. With just one click, we may corrupt our body, mind, and spirit. Based on what we see, we imagine, and act. So anyone who wants to grow as a spiritual man or woman and be used by God in our time must learn how to flee from the bad influence of the internet. God does not use able people for his noble purpose, but men and women with a pure heart (2Ti 2:20-22). If we see a bad image, we must shut it off immediately. If we are tempted by some websites, we must make a decision not to enter into them anymore. If it is difficult to avoid, then we can cut off private internet connections and use it in open areas only. When our mind slips into our lustful imagination, we must shut it off immediately by turning our attention toward spiritual things and praying to God. Admittedly, it is not easy for young people who are full of hormones and energy to overcome lustful desires. But the Bible commands us to take very decisive actions to flee from sexual immorality without any compromise like Joseph in Genesis, who ran away, leaving his cloak in his tempter’s hand.

Second, we must remember that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 19. ***“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own…”*** We must know that our body is very special, not because we are beautiful or handsome, but because the Holy Spirit dwells in us. After the Exodus, God commanded his people to build a tabernacle. The tabernacle was humble. When it was sanctified by the blood of sacrifices, however, God came to dwell among his people and the tabernacle was filled with God’s glory. Our body is humble, fragile and weak, but Christ made it a holy place by washing our sins by his precious blood and then the Holy Spirit came to dwell in us. The Spirit’s indwelling is a mark that we are God’s, bought at the price of Jesus’ precious life. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, we have power to change and to bear fruit.

Third, we must honor God with our bodies. Look at verse 20. ***“…you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”*** Fleeing from sexual immorality and knowing that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit is not enough to live a victorious life. In sports, a purely defensive team effort cannot win the game. Historically, most of the nations that were simply defensive in waging war were eventually defeated by their attackers. The best defense is a good offense. Along with fleeing from sin, we must actively honor God with our bodies. Practically, how can we honor God with our bodies?

When we recognize God’s presence in us and pray for his guidance, we can find many ways in which we can glorify God. Here “body” in verse 20 does not mean our physical body only, but includes the whole person: spirit, mind and physical body. First of all, we need to discipline our bodies to be used as God’s instruments. It is to train our bodies to build up a godly lifestyle. It may include building up a regular prayer life, studying, reading, and meditating on the Bible and reading good Christian books. It also includes practicing the word of God to obey and sharing our spiritual struggles including sins with our brothers or sisters in Christ. At the same time, we can develop our talents to the highest standard of excellence. Secondly, we must offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to worship God (Ro 12:1). It is to devote ourselves to service for God. We can devote our talents to worship service and build up the church. We can offer our bodies to serve the physically and spiritually needy, teach the Bible, and preach the gospel. It is to shepherd Jesus’ sheep (Jn 21:15-17). Overall, it is to imitate Jesus’ lifestyle and participate in his work. In a word, it is to grow as Jesus’ disciple.

God purchased us at the highest price to be the body of Jesus. When we honor God with our bodies, we can live a truly healthy, meaningful, and happy life in him. Honoring God with our bodies and enjoying his presence in our lives are the very purposes of God’s salvation for us. I pray that God may strengthen us to grow in true godliness and build up the body of Christ. May God be glorified through each of our lives and through our church manifesting Christ’s image to the world!