

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



I Cor. 6:12-20, Matthew 5:27-32
“Lust And The Craving For Intimacy”

March 30, 2014
(4th Sunday In Lent)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551
Church Website: www.msumc1.org

“Following Christ From City Center!”

I CORINTHIANS 6:12-20
"LUST AND THE CRAVING FOR INTIMACY"

Greek Philosophy Exalted The Soul, Denigrated The Body

1) vv.12-14 PAUL QUOTES LIBERTINE CORINTHIAN SLOGANS AND REFUTES THEM.

Church Problem = Casual Liaisons With Prostitutes

a) v.12ab Their Claim To Moral Autonomy And Paul's Question Of Prudence. Diatribic Form

(You Corinthians say,) (And I say,) //10:23, Misunderstand Xn Freedom
 12 "All things are *lawful* for me (my right)," but not all things are *beneficial*. Rom. 8:4, 13:8-10, Gal. 5:2
Philosophical Terms, Yes/But Answers

b) v.12cd Their Claim To Moral Autonomy And Paul's Question Of Bondage.

(You Corinthians say,) (And I say,) 10:23, Short, Proverbial, Libertine Slogans
 "All things are *lawful* for me," but I will not be *enslaved* by anything. Back Into Bondage
Some Freedoms Lead Back To Non-Freedom, Seneca *Epistle* 14.1

c) vv.13-14 Their Claim To Sexual License And Paul's Question Of The Body's Future.

(You Corinthians say,) (And I say,) They Euphemize Organs; Not Paul!
 13 1 "Food is meant (1. Moral Principle) "The body is not meant for immorality (*porneia*) Mk. 7:9, Entire Self
Marital Imagery
Gk. Banquets Had Food/Sex
Our Bodies/Selves Belong To Jesus
For Greeks, Sex Was As Natural As Eating/Drinking
Epicurean, Body Has No Future, Dualism
The Body/Creation Is Redeemed!
Not Immortal Soul But Gendered Bodies
Christian Anthropology, 1 Cor. 15:4, Rom. 8:11
For Paul The Body Has Permanent Ethical Significance
 2 and God (2. Basis) (14) And God
raised the Lord (Jesus)
and will raise us
by his power."

2) vv.15-17 TWO ARGUMENTS AGAINST IMMORALITY: DO YOU NOT KNOW?

Paul Reflects Jewish Hostility To Prostitution

15 a Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Yes! Corporate Personality, 12:12
 b Shall I therefore take (away) the members of Christ Illicit Sex Breaks Union With Christ
 and make them members of a prostitute (*porne*)?
 Never! Incompatible Uses Of The Self/Body/Spirit
Church Is Defiled, Philo's *On Joseph* 42-43

16 a' Do you not know that he who joins himself (cleaves) to a prostitute becomes one body with her? Yes!
 For, as it is written, "The two shall become one flesh." Gen. 2:24, 29:12, Enduring/Deep Bond

17 b' But he who is united (cleaves) to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Different Levels Of Union
Spiritual/Physical Intimacy Means *Bonding= Divine Glue*

3) v.18a CONCLUDING COMMAND: NEGATIVE, SOMETHING TO AVOID.

Sexual Misbehavior, Heterosexual/ Homosexual (Pederasty)

18 Shun (flee) immorality (*porneion*). Gen. 39:12, Test. Reub. 5.5, Run Away! 10:14
Prostitution Epitomizes The Abuse Of Human Beings

1') v.18b PAUL QUOTES A THIRD CORINTHIAN SLOGAN AND REFUTES IT.

For Them Bodily Sin Does Not Touch The Essential Self/Soul

(You Corinthians say,) (And I say,) Sin Against Self, Other, Lord, Community
 "Every sin which a man commits Not Follow God's Marital Plan
is outside the body." Actions Reveal Commitments
For Them All Bodily Actions Are Morally Neutral

2') vv.19-20a TWO ARGUMENTS AGAINST IMMORALITY: DO YOU NOT KNOW?

To Violate An Ancient Temple Was A Great Risk Of Wrath

19 a Do you not know that your body is a temple (*naos*, sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit within you ,
Their Anthropology Was In Error
 b which you have from God? First A Gift, Bought By Christ, Now Inhabited By The Holy Spirit!

a' (Do you not know that) You (pl. *all of you*) are not your own? We Live Out Our Identity Together

b' You were bought with a price! We Are Bought And Paid For By Jesus! A Terribly High Price
7:22-23, Sacral Manumission Paid At Temple

3') v.20b Concluding Command: Positive, Something To Do.

Your Body As Gift, Live In Line With God's Good Intentions

So glorify God in your body. Because It Has Such A Glorious And Eternal Future
For Paul The Self Is Unified, Not Split, Bodily Action Always Implicates The Entire Self

MATTHEW 5:27-32 "LUST IS A CANCER IN RELATIONSHIPS"

Violence (5:17-26), Then Sex (5:27-32)

B. 5:27-32 2ND APPLICATION OF THE GREATER RIGHTEOUSNESS PRINCIPLE: ON LUST.

Jesus/Matthew Spoke In Specific Social Contexts

1) vv.27-28 Adultery And The Imagination Of The Heart.

Unconditional Fidelity Only Required Of Wife, Gen. 38:24-25, Num. 5

a) v.27 What The Law Of Moses Said About Behavior: Ex. 20:14, Deut. 5:18, Lev. 20:1-10.

27 "You have heard that it was said,
'You shall not commit adultery.'

Heart Guards The Integrity Of Marriage
Man And Married Woman, Protect Rights Of Neighboring Male

Always Wrong, Law Quoted

Early Application Was To Wives Only, Protect Husband's Rights

b) v.28 Jesus' Heart Level Radicalization Of Marital Fidelity.

Warns Disciples, 10th Command

28 But I say to you
that *every one* who looks (continually) at a woman lustfully
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Not Natural Sexual Fantasy But Lustful Look At Wife Of Another
Problem Is In *His* Heart, Not Her Beauty Law Radicalized

Not Just Married Men, Not All Looks Are Lustful, Female Dignity

Occasion Is Bridge From Fantasy To Deed, Job 31:1-2, 1 Pt. 2:14

Not Address Equal Possibility For Women, Many Jewish Parallels, Exaggeration To Prompt Serious Action

2) vv.29-30 Radical Surgery For Sexual Sin: Deliberate Hyperbole For Emphasis.

Look As Bridge To Eye, Two Examples

a) v.29 The Sin Of The Eye, Invocation Of Hell.

Order Of Sin: Eye, Heart, Mind, Hand
Indulgence In Lust Must Be Radically Purged

29 If your right eye causes you to sin,
pluck it out and throw it away;
it is better that you lose one of your members
than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

//Mk. 9:43 (eye), 47 (hand)
You Must Take Action Against Yourself, Your Sin Problem

The Misuse Of Another Human Being Is Damnable

Do Whatever You Must *Now* To Avoid An Awful Ending *Then*

b) v.30 The Sin Of The Hand, Invocation Of Hell.

vv.29-30 Originally Applied To All Sin, Mk. 9:43-4, Hand/Foot/Eye

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin,
cut it off and throw it away;
it is better that you lose one of your members
than that your whole body go into hell.

Right Side Was More Respectable In Antiquity
A Mutilated Stump Can Still Hide A Wicked Heart

Dealing With Parts Does Not Deal The Heart, Mk. 7:21-23

What We Need Is Friendship, Love And Respect Between Men And Women, Holy Marriages

A BEGINNING ANALYSIS OF THE DEADLY SIN OF *LUST*

CATEGORY	LUST
Bodily Location	Mind, Private Parts
Synonyms	Fornication, Perversion, Lt. <i>Luxuria</i> , <i>Lecherie</i>
Brief Definition	Intense, unbridled sexual desire which is solely interested in gratification
T.V. Mnemonic: <i>Gilligan's Island</i>	Ginger
*Corruption Of Something Good	Sexual desire and the physical bond of marriage
*Life as....	Life as using others to pleasure the self
Healing Virtue	Chastity/ Purity/ Self-control
Blessed are..	The Pure in Heart, Mt. 5:8
One word: <i>A</i>	Avoid
*Discipline	Gendered Fellowship, Recover Genuine Friends
Desire for...	Something wrong, a pleasure God has not granted or blessed
*Stereotype	The Playboy/girl, Lounge lizard, Seduction artist, Dirty Ole Man
Impairs a....	Sense of propriety, common decency
Biblical example	Samson & Delilah, David, Immoral man in 1 Cor. 5
Commandments	7: No Adultery, 10: No coveting another's spouse
Effect on others	Used, discarded
Key verses	Rom. 1:24, Eph. 4:22, 1 Thess. 4:5, 1 Jn. 2:16, Prov. 5:1-23
*You become...	A Predator
*Loss	Capacity For Intimacy, Fidelity, Marriage
*"M" word	MUST
*Hell is...	Unfulfilled passion
*Leads to...	Seduction, Rape, Perversions, Adultery, Porn, Prostitution
*Household item	Bed, Computer Screen
*Theme song	Commodores: "She's A Brick House,"
Emerges as a new layer of the 8 stages. . . .	6) Young adult
Focuses On...	Sexual maturity
How Dante's Punishment fits the vice	Endless tempest that cannot be escaped
Social mapping of deadly sins in Nevada	Number of STD's per capita
*Institutional, Cultural Forms	Pornography, Prostitution
*Personal Evidence	Always "checking people out," lustful eye, no female friends (males)
*Excuse	"It feels good" "I have a right to do this" "It's only natural"
Secular Form	The isolated erotic, pleasure without care, finally anhedonia & boredom

LUST AND THE CRAVING FOR INTIMACY

“Shun immorality!”

An urgent, apostolic, moral command with no exceptions.

I CORINTHIANS 6:18a

You’ve looked forward to being away for a long time and fly to the destination of your dreams. It looks exactly like the picture in the brochure. After checking in, you pick up a ticket for the evening’s show which you’ve heard is quite exotic. You wear your linen pants and flowered shirt. After all, you want to look the part: suave, debonair, worldly-wise.

At eight that evening the dimly lit auditorium is packed. A man in a tuxedo walks out into a circle of light balancing on one hand a large big silver tray covered with a white veil; from the shape you see something roundish underneath. At his cue the orchestra begins a bump-and-grind tune from the burlesque repertoire of a century ago. You think to yourself, This looks interesting! After some enticing maneuvers to increase anticipation, the veil is lifted with a flair. There on the tray is a luscious, ripe, firm, navel orange, well proportioned and succulent. The crowd gasps. Your mouth salivates; the magic is having its effect.

The emcee then takes out a knife and begins ever-so-slowly to peel the orange. As each curl of hull falls to the stage you sense adrenalin and arousal increasing. Having stripped the fruit of its rind, he holds it up and takes a huge bite as the crowd goes bonkers. The lights dim, the curtain falls, act one is over. A glance at the program reveals the next two acts feature new hosts with an mango, then a pineapple. Everyone’s eager for more, everyone except you. You’re disturbed by what you’ve just seen and slip out quietly. What is this strange island, and what’s gone wrong with peoples’ appetite for fruit?¹

¹ A creative expansion from C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Chapter 5. The quote is: “You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act- that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover

This is not an allegory about fruit but men and women, their gendered bodies and the vital energies of attraction that go under the name *human sexuality*. The transparency of my fiction makes a point. We would all think it odd- even perverse- for such a thing to happen with an orange, but it happens often with another appetite, so often we fail to notice how out of sync it truly is.

Lust is sixth in the classic list of seven deadly sins (i.e. pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, and *lust*; only one remains- gluttony!). Three are rooted in the body- its responses and appetites; these are anger, gluttony, and lust. Three find their origin at another level- more mental and spiritual: pride, envy, and greed. Sloth is a hybrid of sorts. Behind lust is the twisting and inflammation of a good desire, an appetite built into our bodies by the Creator to bring male and female together in a partnership of vulnerability in order to glue them together in an abiding bond of marriage and open them to the gift of children. In the best of the biblical vision, sex is about holy desires directed towards the good ends of love, commitment, union, pleasure, care, fidelity, babies, and the creation of a community that cooperates with God’s designs against all substitutes. The Bible contains numerous stories of the casualties of lust: Samson and Delilah, David and Bathsheba, Solomon and his many pagan wives, Jesus and the woman at the well. The beauty and the ugliness are both in God’s honest book. The entire Song of Solomon, is devoted to steamy love poetry. Some of it is hard to read in church, and I am told is even more explicit in Hebrew!

I define lust as *unbridled sexual desire which turns the other into a short term object of satisfaction, and- in its habituated forms- regards the other as disposable*. Lust is about an *it*, not a *person* with a life and maybe even a faith; lust is quick consumption rather than lifelong communion within a covenant of marriage. Lust never satisfies the heart which longs for emotional intimacy and commitment to accompany ecstasy. Men with lust problems rarely develop genuine friendships with women and are easily spotted as men not to be trusted. The church makes a lot of these distortions precisely because sex and gender are big issues; they’re about love and life, about marriage and babies, about the creation of a humane culture and the right reception of God’s gifts.² Frederick Beuchner writes:

so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?”

² On lust as a vice because God made sex and its multiple purposes a big deal, see Rebecca K. DeYoung, *Glittering Vices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 159-179. On

“Sex is sinful to the degree that, instead of drawing you closer to other human beings in their humanness, it unites bodies but leaves the lives inside them hungrier and more alone than before.... Contrary to Mrs. Grundy, sex is not a sin. Contrary to Hugh Hefner, it’s not salvation either. Like nitroglycerin, it can... blow up bridges or heal hearts.”³

We sing with pride of America as the land of the free and the home of the brave, and so we are in some ways that continue to be noble, but we are also the land of the lustful and the home of the obsessed. We titillate audiences to sell everything from automobiles to beer. Porn is 14 billion dollar a year industry.⁴ We spew our smut around the world, which is- by the way- one of the reasons the Islamic world hates us so, and I might say legitimately on this count. They are right; our pop culture- especially its music and hyper-sexualized media- is an attack on the stability of the family and an all-out assault on virtue of modesty.

If the national statistics are true, some twenty percent of men in our churches- young and older- are deeply involved in porn, some to the point of addiction, and it is a great shame and embarrassment to those closest to them- particularly their wives, who should adopt an no-tolerance policy. Stop it! Do not bring shame on yourself, on your family, on the name of Jesus or the reputation of this church. Join me to sit with a teenage girl who discovered her dear daddy’s secret stash. “What kind of man is my dad? Does my mother know about it? Does he look at me and my friends like that? Is he a Christian?” How would you answer? I hear some ugly stories; I pray with and give guidance to sexually broken people on a regular basis, and I hope I do it with mercy, realism, and the toughness of Christian wisdom that is committed to rescuing and rehabilitating the victims of this plague. A downward slide continues as our society is rendered morally numb. David Carlin sums up forty years of the *Hugh Hefner Curve*:

"You start with a magazine proclaiming that sex, so far from being dirty, isn't even serious, just good, clean fun. A few decades later you have

what the Bible and John Wesley teach, see Ben Witherington’s blog “Eros Defended- Or Eros Defiled,” www.patheos.com/community/bibleandculture/2011/02/14/eros-defended-or-eros-defiled-what-do-wesley-and-the-bible-say.

³ (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 107

⁴ www.cnbc.com/id/45989346.

massive abortions, vast numbers of children born to teenagers from the poorest of society, and an organization named the North American Man-Boy Love Association going on national TV to explain that your basic pedophile... is not molester, but a lonely boy's best friend."⁵

Hello America! Behind STDs, behind the overwhelming majority of abortions, behind molestation and abuse lies the deadly sin of lust, of desire let loose without moral control. It is rooted in one of our instinctual urges that emerges during puberty and young adulthood in the tension between intimacy and isolation. Sexuality is a powerful means of communication. It is body-language and knowledge in the deep sense. In Genesis God pronounces each stage of creation *good*, but after the creation of man and woman the verdict is *very good*.

Human sexuality is the biological foundation for emotional intimacy, for reproduction, for fidelity between husband and wife. It also has the power- because of the pleasure it promises- to control a life through the addictive process, and because it is malleable can be bent in different directions. Harry Williams defines lust as "an attempt to snatch value for myself from someone else: all such greedy snatching can be an act of plain cruelty."⁶ When people are turned into disposable body parts, lust has corrupted a good gift, and when we treat young persons like hormone-driven mammals instead of emerging decision makers, we demean and set them up for tragic consequences. It takes more than a sheath of latex to protect you from a broken heart.⁷ Outside marriage, sex is not safe for body or soul. The teaching of the church is clear, and here I quote from *The Social Principles*, "sexual relations are affirmed *only within the covenant of monogamous heterosexual marriage*."⁸ Another way to state it, also from our *Discipline*, is that disciples of

⁵ Albert Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 185.

⁶ D. Capps, *Deadly Sins & Saving Virtues* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 54.

⁷ For analyses of the current university hook-up culture and the damage it does, particularly to women, see Donna Freitas, *The End of Sex* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2013; Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America* (Oxford, England: University Press, 2011); for an analysis by a U.C.L.A psychiatrist I've heard lecture, see Miriam Grossman, M.D., *Unprotected* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2007).

⁸ *The Book of Discipline 2012*, 110.

Jesus Christ are to be *celibate in singleness and faithful in marriage*.⁹ It's not hard to understand, only hard to practice in our culture with its assumptions about every impulse being worthy of immediate fulfillment with no consequences.

Either you win the war with Christ's aid and the support of his followers, or you will live in shame and fear all your days.¹⁰ Forgiveness is easy to receive when confession is made; what's more difficult is to submit your desires to Christ for re-education and re-training in a culture like ours. We in the church just happen to think our way is better. Not prudish, not repressed, but smarter and better and healthier for body and emotions. Understanding, integrity and right expression go together. Don't live another day under a cloud of shame; whatever your history, and I do mean *whatever*, tell the Lord exactly what you've done that wrong, then let his acceptance and forgiveness and healing and love offer a fresh start and a new perspective.

The deadly seven sins are woven into all our stories in varying degrees. And depending on what's going on in the culture, one or the other finds dominance. An argument can be made that lust is now king-of-the-hill, gluttony a close second, with greed and the gambling craze in third. What's clear is that we've lost a proper view of our bodies, their marvelous powers for work and love, and what they mean. As a people, we are being reduced to and defined by out-of-control appetites.

Scripture and the classic faith of the church teach we are born damaged. In the words of Bob Dylan, "I was blinded by the devil, born already ruined, stone cold dead as I stepped out of the womb."¹¹ Good remains, but is everywhere mixed with the *not-good*. We know the name of the disease and the seven symptoms, and in Christ we have access to the divine medicine that brings a cure. So if you're ever shocked by the behavior of yourself or another- as it regards lust, it's an indicator you do not yet understand the radical nature of what the church teaches about our fallen condition. Without God's grace and restraint we are hopeless, and beyond that dangerous. Lust and prostitution and porn and the forms of perversity and sexual violence the Scripture forbids are all evidence the good fountain of our sexuality has

⁹ Ibid, 776.

¹⁰ See Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoker, *Every Man's Battle* (Waterbrook Press, 2009) and Shannon Ethridge, Stephen Arterburn, *Every Woman's Battle* (Waterbrook Press, 2009) for solid psychological and spiritual counsel on sexual integrity.

¹¹ "Saved," lyrics found at www.tabsforworship.com/tab/156.htm.

been poisoned.¹² We are fragile creatures, nowhere more so than in our gendered bodies. We are vulnerable by God’s design, but when into our lively flesh the poisons of sin and evil are injected, there’s almost no limit to the pain we can inflict on ourselves and others as we thrash around trying to make a life apart from God.

No area of human life is more full of mystery and magnetism than our sexuality, which is not something added on to humanity but constitutive from conception.¹³ You do not *have* a body; you *are* an embodied and thus a gendered soul, and after a season without a body in heaven after death, Christians receive a new resurrection body like that of the risen Jesus when the kingdom descends from on high at the end and transforms everything.¹⁴ This the Creed names in its last phrase, “I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.” Your resurrection body will be male or female, just as the risen Jesus remains male and masculine. The polarity of male and female is permanent. What God has created and is now broken, will be fully redeemed and fulfill in ways we cannot comprehend.¹⁵

So until the kingdom comes, it’s one of the jobs of the church to set forth God’s vision for how sexuality is designed to work, celebrating that in marriage, then dealing wisely and gently with the casualties and on occasion reminding people that the list of persons excluded from the new world where Jesus reigns always includes those who make a habit and lifestyle of seduction.¹⁶ If I treat those who bear God’s image as usable and disposable, then I risk God treating me that way because along the way I’ve already become something less than human myself; I have become a

¹² See Leviticus 19 for a detailed catalog of practices the Jews rejected.

¹³ Two excellent books by Christian psychologists and therapists are Dr. Archibald Hart, *The Sexual Man* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1995), Clifford and Joyce Penner *Men And Sex* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1997).

¹⁴ Our best account of the biblical vision of two-stage post-mortem existence: (1) heaven after death plus 2) the kingdom and resurrection at the end of history) remains N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008).

¹⁵ Psalm 16:11 is a hint, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore,” as is I Cor. 2:9, “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.’”

¹⁶ E.g. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Revelation 21:8.

user without regard, much less love, for others.¹⁷ We are never through with the work of letting Christ be Lord of our bodies and desires. It is the pure in heart who see God, not because the world around them has changed but because they have. Innocence and wonder and beauty and the integrity of self-control can be restored to damaged people only by the grace of God. It is here that moral clarity and pastoral compassion go together without the surrender of either, and today people want the compassion without the clarity, easy acceptance without the call to be changed and learn new ways. People need boundaries; people also need help and healing and coaching and patience and prayer, and sometimes even spiritual deliverance from spirits of lust and perversion which cling to the defiled like glue.¹⁸

I've given this introduction as a framework for understanding how our common fallen condition distorts our bodily appetites and capacities. This helps us understand how Christian men in Corinth could continue to visit prostitutes even after they were converted and filled with the Spirit. In that culture sexual adventurism was largely a men's issue; women who dared what men regularly did were often killed.

It was expected in the first century that Greek men would marry by age thirty. But since so many more female than male children were allowed to die through abandonment and exposure, there was a shortage of women, so most men married ten or more years their junior. Wives were for legitimate children; fun and companionship were elsewhere. The dalliances of recent French and Italian politicians, and even some of our own, demonstrate that this pattern is still popular among Alpha-males. Even after marriage a Greek man was allowed to visit prostitutes, to have physical relationships with younger men, and it was not thought unmanly. *Whatever* and *whenever*, *whoever* and *however* was the rule in ancient paganism; as long as you did not play the role of a woman, all was accepted.¹⁹

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 4:16-17.

¹⁸ On what has come to be called *deep-level-healing*, a combination of psychological insights and spiritual power, see Charles H. Kraft, *Deep Wounds, Deep Healing* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2010 revised edition); also by Kraft, *Two Hours to Freedom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2010); other resources available at HeartsSetFree.org.

¹⁹ On sexual practices in the first century, see Craig Keener, *I Corinthians* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Press, 2005), 56-61; Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1994), 29-36. The definitive study on pederasty and homosexuality in the ancient world and early church remains Robert A. J. Gagnon's

Need I remind you that the practices of ancient paganism are making a big comeback in our day and with them their silly justifications, such as, “The stomach is for food, other organs for other activities, and since the body will not survive death, what you do with it doesn’t matter. It is the immortal soul that is supreme; it alone survives death, ‘So eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall all die.’”

But hedonism, the unrestrained pursuit of bodily pleasure, was a practice rooted in a consistent- and consistently wrong- philosophy. This was the cultural imprint of many of the gentile men in the Corinthian church and, as you can guess, was a hard habit to break and one that put them at odds with many of their unconverted friends. Jews, of course, who lived in cities like Corinth, did not follow this path. They’d heard the Scriptures and- for the most part- held higher ethical standards of heterosexual monogamy and fidelity. Their view of the body was also different. Some Jews - notably the Pharisees- believed in the resurrection of the body at the end of the age and used that as an additional argument against immorality. If God has such a glorious future for us and our new bodies, it is an act of faith to line up with God’s will here and now. The body is to be used only in ways God allows within marriage because we belong to Jesus and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit as living temples. We are to show the world how life works best. This was Paul’s vision, and it was in deep continuity with Jesus.²⁰

It is an insight of biblical religion that we tend to build our philosophy of life and religion around the sins we wish to justify. Few people reject the Christian faith for serious intellectual reasons; they reject it mainly for moral and emotional reasons; they do not wish to be separated from their pet sins and their associated satisfactions.²¹ Find what a man enjoys- what he could not imagine living without- and there you will find his altar to a private god. For some sports, for others money or power, for others a business, for some sexual adventure and the rush that accompanies the conquest and the high. It was this last group that Paul took on argument-for-argument and line-for-line.

The Bible And Homosexual Practice (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2001), with updates available at www.robgagnon.net.

²⁰ Mark 10:1-12, 7:14-23.

²¹ For a brief defense of this insight, see James S. Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist* (Chicago, ILL: Moody, 2010). Atheists often seek cover for an immoral agenda.

So it was in the Greek city where Paul set up his leather-working shop and began to evangelize the lusty city of Corinth. We know from his church roster in chapter 6 that the sexually immoral- both heterosexual and homosexual- had come to faith in Christ through his ministry.²² But in his absence, there'd been some backsliding. The culture was again winning over the new faith and its rigorous personal ethic. Some were claiming that since they had come to Christ and were now filled with the Spirit, they could do just as they pleased. They were now linked to the heavenly world and far above earthly morals. "All things are lawful for me," was their clever slogan. Paul responded, "That is not freedom, but the path back into bondage." Christians are given the liberty to obey God, not to do as we please. So Paul engages in a sharp dialog by first quoting their slogans, then refuting them. What we have here are the notes of an ongoing conversation.

Their second argument was sophomoric. It was the biological argument from bodily urges. Sex, they argued, is as natural and therefore ethically neutral. We eat what and when we want, and we sleep with who we wish. All appetites are of the same order of importance. Since God gave them, we fulfill them. What an great arrangement! Here is a paraphrase of their argument:

"My stomach grumbles, so I eat. I burn with desire, so I find an outlet. If I have to pay money, so what? What's the difference, Paul? Both are bodily urges, and as we all know, the body is not permanent, only temporary. God both this and that will destroy."

As good Greeks tutored by Plato, they separated the body and the essential self or soul since only the soul survives death- or so they thought. To this Paul responded that the whole unified person, body and soul, is not for immorality but for the Lord. Contrary to our bodies being destroyed and abandoned, they will be fulfilled by being resurrected, as was Jesus. Sexual immorality and lust, writes Paul, are contrary to our baptism which bonds us to Christ and his body the church. "Don't you know this?" he writes in frustration. His command is blunt, "Shun immorality." Here's how John Wesley put it, "Flee fornication, all unlawful commerce with women, with speed, with abhorrence, with all your might."²³ Don't play near the fire; run from it. No porn in your home, no strip clubs or stag parties before weddings for either bride or groom. It surprises me to have to say this, but it continues as a problem. But how can

²² I Cor. 6:9-11.

²³ John Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament*, accessed on the internet.

you honor your beloved if you've just treated others of their gender as human trash to be purchased for entertainment? Do we not see the ugly contradiction?

Paul's problem children went so far as to believe what they did with their bodies had no moral relevance whatever. Sin was a matter of the heart and the intention, an inward thing, not something involving the body.²⁴ It is possible they thought, since body and spirit are separate, to have a relationship with Christ in the *inner man* and for the *outer man* to continue in immorality. They formed it into a catchy slogan in verse 18: "Every sin which a man commits is *outside the body*."

But Paul refused to separate the essential self from the body. Bodily actions reveal the self and its commitments. "The immoral man sins against his own body," was Paul's reply. With his body a man says in a one-night stand, "I am one with you; I give myself to you," but with his life he says the opposite, "I use and then throw you away." His actions are a self-centered lie. His body-language lacks integrity. What was meant by God as an act of life-long commitment to one is turned into its opposite. But the bond is still there. A bit of DNA is not all you leave behind. You leave a piece of your soul, a slice of your heart; you are imprinted with a memory that will not fade. Your ability to be faithful to only one is weakened. Marriage does not automatically cure an acquired habit for immorality. A taste for variety is not uprooted by a simple wedding vow, and anyway, your head is still full of the movies, which is why the United Methodist Wedding Service includes in the initial vows the loaded phrase "forsaking all others," meaning all others who came before.²⁵ How wise and realistic is the church? Very, precisely because we have lot of experience.

What I miss here is any concern for the poor women who were being used, but since Paul is addressing a problem with men, perhaps that's too much to expect at this point. In my years as a pastor I've counseled with eight to ten prostitutes in and out of jail, and every one had been raped and molested as young women. Something was stolen from them long before they began to believe that's all they're good for. It is a great evil, and anyone who profits from it or participates in it is opening themselves to demonic infestation.²⁶ You do not want to be inhabited and driven by spirits of lust

²⁴ J.M. O'Connor, *1 Corinthians* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1979), 51.

²⁵ *U.M. Hymnal*: 865.

²⁶ Dr. Francis McNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1995), especially chapter 15, "Spirits of Sin," 196-202.

and perversion which infect the open wounds of sin. By God's design this is not only a physical and emotional but also a spiritual union. You can pick up all sorts of critters by practicing immorality, some of which cannot be cured by antibiotics.

Paul then gives two additional words to give these men a new perspective on their bodies. "Your body," he wrote, "is the temple of the Holy Spirit," and secondly, "you were bought with a price." Bought with his blood; we now belong to Jesus. Paul's question is vivid, "Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never." The Holy Spirit now lived in each of them. If they were the carriers of divine presence, why were they mixing the holy and the unholy? Why were they living a dangerous lie? Didn't they know? Apparently not.

"So glorify God in your body," was his final and positive command. For the married, this means fidelity, and for the single it means chastity because it's good for you. No shacking for Christians! Pagans may live as they please. Instead, show restraint, self-control, real love for your to-be. It's what Scripture and the church teach, and it's now backed by solid research on how greatly it increases divorce.²⁷ When we adopt any other standard, we're caving into an indulgent culture that's not good for people. This is the single biggest issue currently facing the mainline churches in America, and underneath it is a voice which demands, "I have the right do what I want, and no one has the right to say otherwise." Not if you are a disciple of Jesus or a member of one of our churches. It might just be more honest to withdraw and admit you are baptized unbeliever.

It is an unpopular truth in our indulgent age, but- biblically speaking- you've been married to everyone you slept with. C.S. Lewis put it well, "The truth is that whenever a man lies with a woman, there, whether they like it or not, a transcendent relation is set up between them which must be eternally enjoyed or eternally endured."²⁸ There is nothing casual about sex, no matter how casual people are about it. It has permanent consequences. The Corinthian men thought they could bond with one after another with no consequences. What a lie. The gift of the self cannot be taken back. The ignorance of lust is that it does not take the fact of bonding seriously. It speeds to its destination with abandon. It doesn't finally care what it

²⁷ On the downside of cohabitation as a strategy, see Mike and Harriet McManus, *Living Together: Myths, Risks & Answers* (New York: Howard Books, 2008); Glenn T. Stanton, *The Ring Makes All The Difference* (Chicago, ILL: Moody Press, 2011).

²⁸ www.sadyebabi.com/weblog/archives/2005/07/screw-tape-lette.html.

does to the self or the other in its quest for satisfaction. Lust is a form of insanity.

One of the causes of divorce in our day is that couples have so many lovers before they marry that the primal glue has worn thin and they are unable to bond deeply enough with one person to carry them through the rough spots. It just won't hold. God's erotic and emotional Super Glue is reduced to the stick-on-and-tear-off power of a *Post-It* note. As one man said, "God may forgive your sins but your nervous system won't. Forgiveness is the easy part once sexual sin is confessed. What takes patience is the work of repentance, restoration, and sanctification. Hearts must heal, and that requires time, discipline, self-control, a willingness to grieve, abstinence, and the recovery of profound respect for the bonding process."²⁹

Paul was in a battle at Corinth. It is a battle that must be fought by every man and women who desires to follow Jesus Christ. It's about self-control and self-respect; it's about spiritual integrity; and if you are married it's about learning to love one woman or man all your life and in that context to find yourself profoundly healed. That is my testimony. I am a better man because I'm married to Lori. Now whether or not she is a better woman because she is married to me is still up for discussion!

Sexuality and spirituality do not live in separate compartments; we are- each of us- one whole person. Glorifying God in our bodies means saying a joy-filled *Yes* to God's gift of male and female and then learning to live within the bounds God sets for us in this chaotic world which will lure and abuse us at every turn. This love of God in Jesus is tough and tender, gentle and firm, each at the right time.

Friends, we've already lost the war in the culture; I am not willing to lose it in the church as well, as is now happening in the mainline churches whose historic weakness is that we've always taken our cues more from the intellectual fads of the culture and our perceived experiences rather than from Scripture and the deep Trinitarian faith of the church. When the world grows sick and tired of its sins and asks, Is there a better way to live? I want there to be a few Methodists left to say,

²⁹ See Joe Dallas and Nancy Heche (mother of actress Ann Heche), *The Complete Christian Guide to Understanding Homosexuality: A Biblical And Compassionate Response to Same-Sex Attraction* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2010); for a testimony see Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010); for a recent treatment by a Wesleyan scholar, see Howard A. Snyder, *Homosexuality And The Church: Defining Issue Or Distracting Battle?* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed, 2014).

1 Cor. 6:12-20, Mt. 5:27-30 17

“Yes, let us open the Scriptures and seek the Lord together.” Flee immorality!
Glorify God in your body! Be ruled by Jesus Christ!

