

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (DHT)

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin a man does is outside his body. But the sexually immoral sin against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with honor. Therefore, glorify God in your body.

Introduction – What’s the Deal with Sexual Immorality?

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who have sex with men, nor the soft, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you, but you were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Messiah Jesus and by the Spirit of God. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything... God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. (1 Cor. 6:9ff)

Our passage this morning is the conclusion to these profound words of Paul on the immediate, transformative power of the Gospel. God, our Father, sees and knows everything. This can be frightening, but we must always remember that God, our Father, who sees and knows everything about us, also sees and knows our faith in his Son. Those who are unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God, yet those who put their faith in the resurrection of Jesus are declared righteous. Regardless of how vast the past sinfulness of any and every one of you may be, your faith in Messiah’s resurrection gives you the inheritance of God’s kingdom.

Over the last several decades, the Western Church has been rightly criticized from within, and certainly from outside, for improperly emphasizing the sinfulness of homosexuality while ignoring the other sins Paul lists. While it is true that, except for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, all sins are equally damnable before a holy God, equally require the death of Jesus to cover, and equally require faith in his resurrection to overcome. Yet, at the same time, there is a remarkable focus in the NT on the need for God’s people to flee all types of sexual immorality. There is something about this that is different from other types of sin.

Our passage this morning tells us that what makes the broad category of sexual-immorality more sinful is *not* that it is extra sinful in the eyes of God, but that it involves sinning *against our own body*. Can you say the word, *hamartia*? This is the Greek word for “sin.” This

word comes from the idea of an archer shooting arrows at a target and missing the mark. Writing 350 years before the birth of Jesus, Aristotle wrote of *hamartia* as including both intentional and accidental errors. Now we could simply say that we miss the mark against our own body by not living up to our creational-design, and this would be a conclusion backed up by a great deal of Scripture. In this specific passage, though, the reason why the sexually-immoral sin *against their own body* in verse 18 is immediately explained in verse 19, *do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?* To engage, therefore, in sexual-immorality is to sin against a holy God and to pollute the holiness intended for your body-temple.

Paul is not talking about unbelievers; he’s talking about Christians. If you have put your faith in the resurrection of Jesus one of the immediate benefits given to you is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean only Christians can be guilty of sexual immorality, but the *extra* sinfulness of sexual immorality, namely that we sin against God *and our own body*, is because of what the *Christian* body fundamentally is; what the Christian body has been immediately transformed into. In our passage, at the conclusion of this famous chapter, Paul provides the justification for the requirement of Christian to abstain from sexual-immorality and it centers on the claim that all believers are in fact temples of the Holy Spirit. This is the basis for the NT emphasis on sexual holiness.

What Makes a Temple a Temple?

What does the body-temple metaphor mean? Is the body-temple image a metaphor at all? To answer that, we must first answer the question: What makes a temple a temple?

In Genesis 1-2, we read of God, our Father, constructing his cosmic temple—all the cosmos is a footstool to his throne. Earlier this year, the images of NASA’s James Webb telescope captivated Americans and the world. These images reflect mere clusters of the universe. They told us if you held a single grain of sand up to the sky at arm-length, the amount of universe covered by that one grain of sand is what was captured by these images some 4.6 billion light-years away. Yet even the depths of the universe captured by the Webb telescope fall under the sovereignty of God. We have a God who is both immanent, meaning he is near to us, and transcendent, meaning he is apart from and beyond us. No matter how far and deep into

space science can show us, there is not one Planck-Length that is outside the reign of our God; not one Cosmic-Dimension that is not a footstool to the even greater glory of our Lord.

Why is all creation a temple? There are no fewer than 38 reasons why creation and the Garden of Eden should be thought of as a temple. I’ll let you read all the reasons next year when I finish my thesis. For the sake of our time, I’ll simply say that the localized presence of the transcendent God transforms *any* space into *sacred* space. Like a Venn diagram, when the uncreated-divine realm breaks into the created realm, such as with the Garden of Eden, we rightly call that sacred space the *meeting place* of heaven and earth.

Sometime later after God rescued Israel from Egypt, he commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle, which was also called the Tent of Meeting or the Tent of Presence. The Tent of Meeting was the meeting place of heaven and earth. If you’ve read through Exodus, the tabernacle construction instructions are monotonous and meticulous. They finally had a finished structure, but that is all it was, a structure. But then, we read that the glory of YHWH filled the tabernacle. Only once it had been filled by the glory of YHWH could the Tent of Meeting truly be the meeting place of heaven and earth. Within the tabernacle, the specific meeting place was at the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. God’s presence was between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. Israel followed the guidance of God’s presence located in the tabernacle as they wandered through the wilderness and entered the Promised Land.

Sometime later, a boy named Samuel was called by God to be a prophet while he was sleeping in the Holy of Holies, “where the ark of God was” (1 Sam. 3:3). The Philistines came against Israel, and sizably defeated Israel. Israel, not accustomed to military defeat, decided they would bring the Ark of the Covenant out of the tabernacle and into battle, because then surely they would defeat the Philistines. Well, that didn’t work—the Philistines totally defeated Israel and captured the Ark of the Covenant; the presence of God no longer with Israel. The Philistines brought the Ark of the Covenant into the temple to their god Dagon, and the idols to Dagon were destroyed almost immediately, and for seven months the Philistines moved the Ark of the Covenant around because every city it went in experienced a plague. Finally, they determined that Israel’s God was too much to bear, so they returned God’s presence to God’s people at Beth-Shemesh, a small city near the border with Philistia.

Twenty years later, David had the desire to restore the Ark of the Covenant within the tabernacle in the heart of Israel, in Jerusalem. While they were carrying the Ark of the Covenant

to Jerusalem, the animals carrying the cart stumbled. One of the priests named Uzzah reached out his hand to stabilize the Ark, and was struck dead. This seems a bit rash, except for the fact that in the meticulous and monotonous instructions, Israel was unequivocally commanded to transport the Ark of the Covenant *by priests* holding poles through the rings on the side of the Ark.¹ In every example in the Bible, the Israelites followed these instructions until Uzzah made a cart.² Additionally “carts or wagons were for things... *never* for royalty. Placing the ark on a cart was an insult. They were celebrating its return, but by putting the ark on a cart, they were in essence saying the ark was cargo. Also, it was the Philistines who came up with the idea of the ark-cart (1 Sam. 6:8-11), so instead of following God’s law, they were following the example of their enemies. It shouldn’t surprise us that God was mad.”³

This had a profound effect on David who felt unworthy to finish the 31-mile journey, so he dropped off the Ark of the Covenant at the house of Obed-Edom, whose house was blessed during its time there. After three months, David had the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem *the right way*. 1 Chronicles 15 says that *David prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. Then David said that no one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for YHWH had chosen them to carry the ark of YHWH and to minister to him forever... So the priests and the Levites consecrated themselves to bring up the ark of YHWH, the God of Israel, and the Levites carried the ark of God on their shoulders with the poles, as Moses had commended according to the word of YHWH* (vs. 1-2, 14-15). David had clearly learned his lesson that the holiness of God is to be honored with nothing short of obedience.

David had the Ark of the Covenant brought back into the tabernacle in Jerusalem, and then he sought to construct for God a lasting resting place for his glory. David wanted to transition God from the transitory nature of the Tent to the permanent nature of the Temple. But his will did not line up with God’s will, so David humbly submitted to God’s will that his son Solomon would be who would build a permanent temple-house for YHWH. Sometime later when Solomon became king he set out to build this permanent structure. He made this temple an elaborate piece of architectural art, furnished with only the best, and gave an impassioned prayer as the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the structure. 2 Chron. 7:1 succinctly tells us *as soon as Solomon finished his prayer...the glory of YHWH filled the temple*.

¹ Ex. 25:10-15; Num. 4:15; 7:7-9; Deut. 10:8

² Deut. 31:9, 25; Josh. 3:3, 15, 17; 4:9-10, 18; 6:6; 8:33; 1 Sam. 4:4

³ From the book excerpt of David Lamb’s *God Behaving Badly* (IV Press, Downers Grove, 2011)

There was nothing particularly special or mystifying about the temple-building that made it sacred space; it was God’s presence that made it the meeting place of heaven and earth. While the temple-building was intended to be permanent, its status as “temple” was not. Sometime later, the first batch of exiles was taken to Babylon. Among them was the prophet Ezekiel. After the first batch of exiles was taken, Ezekiel tells us the glory of YHWH *left* the temple (ch.10). God’s presence left the temple because the priests were offering sacrifices to particularly abominable idols. God’s presence left the temple and appeared in Babylon, of all places, *with* the exiles. “The irony” of Ezekiel 8 is that “the glory of Yahweh appears to Ezekiel in Babylon (where it ‘shouldn’t’ be) and takes him on a tour of the temple (where it ‘should’ be).”⁴ To make matters worse for Israel, sometime later Babylon destroyed Solomon’s “permanent” structure previously called the temple.

But then the exile ended and when the remnant returned home, Ezra and Nehemiah sought to build a new temple. They had no divine directive to rebuild, and they had no need to rebuild, for God’s presence had effectively been with his people in Babylon *without* a structure. But they rebuilt it nevertheless. It did not have the pizzazz Solomon’s temple had, but more importantly there is no record of God’s presence or glory ever filling the second temple.

But the temple had an aura to it. The idea of the temple being the meeting place of heaven and earth was too strong an Israelite worldview to process the lack of God’s presence. So when Jesus is walking by the physical structure of the second temple he can say that every stone of that structure called the temple would be thrown down and also that in the lifetime of that generation heaven and earth would pass away (Mark 13). Was Jesus referring to the end of the whole cosmic order within a few decades? Of course not! He was referring to the destruction of the second temple, which did occur in the lifetime of that generation, a few decades later in AD 70 during the persecution of Nero.⁵

Just after his first miracle at the wedding of Cana, Jesus makes one of the first self-predictions of his death and resurrection. John 2:18-22 says this: *The Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and the third day I will raise it up.” The Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,*

⁴ Tim Mackie, unpublished Commentary on Ezekiel given in the course BT 670 at Western Seminary, Summer 2021

⁵ Nero tormented the church for the precise amount of time biblical prophecy assigned to the antichrist and the numerical value of the letters of Nero’s name add up to 666; but must address that “coincidence” another time.

and you will raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this.

How can Jesus talk about the destruction of the physical structure called the temple and the destruction of his physical body? And why, in commenting about what follows the destruction, is only his body given the hope of a return? This all drives back to the title question: What makes a temple a temple? A temple is any time and space when and where the uncreated-divine realm breaks into the created realm; the localized presence of the transcendent God transforms *any* space into *sacred* space. This has no truer example than in the person of Jesus who is both fully God and fully man. Jesus is *the word made flesh*. He would be crucified for claiming to be the Son of God, and yet by his own self-prediction, his resurrection would prove his claim to be true. The reason Jesus can talk about the destruction of the structure called the temple with no prospect of a rebuild and the destruction of his temple-body with the certain and nearly immediate rebuild is because *a temple is not defined by a structure, but by God’s presence*.

This de-emphasis on the building structure to emphasize God’s presence escalates in John’s apocalyptic vision, which culminates in all of heaven coming down to the new earth as New Jerusalem. John writes in Revelation 21 that he *saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb*. John sees no temple in the city and yet at the same time sees a temple, *defined as God’s presence*. In the age to come, there is no need for any structure to house a portion of God’s presence for the entirety of God’s presence will be with all his people in the most complete way possible.

So where does this idea from our passage this morning fit into all this? Twice in 1 Corinthians Paul explicitly refers to the individual bodies of all believers as temples. He does this in 1 Cor. 3:16-17 and 6:18-20, rooting both with the same reason. *Do you not know that you are God’s temple; that God’s Spirit dwells in you... God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. // Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?* In what sense are the bodies of believers temples? If you have put your faith in the resurrection of Jesus one of the immediate benefits given to you is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That means if you are a Christian, the presence of God literally resides in your body.

My body is a temple because my body is a place where heaven meets earth, just like it was with Jesus. As I say that though, it must also be said that while my body is a temple just like Jesus’ body was a temple, the reason why my body is a temple is different. The moment the Word became flesh, the body of Jesus was a temple. That first Christmas morning, Mary held in her hands a temple. His status as eternal Son of God defines the entirety of his human existence as a temple. His body is a temple because of who he is. This is not so with me. I only became a temple when the Holy Spirit indwelt me, which only occurred when I put my faith in Jesus, and so my status as a temple is entirely outside of myself, whereas with Jesus it is entirely himself.

Sometime ago I asked whether the body-temple image was a metaphor for something and what it meant. The body-temple idea is *not* a metaphor. Our bodies are literally temples because they literally house God’s presence; and God’s presence transforms *any* space it occupies into *sacred space*. Our bodies are literally temples *in the same way the tabernacle or Solomon’s temple were*. There is something inherently valuable about our bodies that do not automatically tarnish the presence of God. This should come as no surprise to us, though since in the beginning when God created us male and female, our physical bodies were created as images of God’s glory in creation. It should come as no surprise to us that our bodies matter to God.

Does the Body-Soul Dichotomy Intersect with the Gospel?

But this is an idea that is lost on our culture, which has totally bought into Platonism, the worldview of personhood in which the soul is distinct from and entrapped by the body. In our culture today we hear things along the lines of our true selves being trapped in the wrong body. This is not a new idea; it was popularized by the philosopher Plato four centuries before the birth of Christ, and it is in no way biblical. Platonism is antithetical to the Bible on face value. Any sense of self that is detached from the body as it was created to be is to fundamentally misunderstand what it means to be human. There is no humanity absent the body. In line with the erroneous, unbiblical worldview of Platonism, our culture loves to catechize us and your kids that the heart is the source of all true and pure sense of self. Recently, my Panda Express fortune cookie told me: “Follow your heart—it will never be wrong.” Really? Lady Gaga’s iconic song “Born This Way” reflects this thinking as well when it teaches rather deceptively under the shroud of religious imagery in the music video that at the moment of our birth we are the purest

form of our self because our lowly body-prison only *then* begins to corrupt us; therefore, in the thinking of Gaga the central aim of humanity to resolve that which is wrong with humanity is to exalt the inner self and destroy the external self by living disembodied, for these two are mutually exclusive.⁶

This is just not the way the Bible speaks about the human experience. The Bible never speaks of the body and the soul as divisible and opposable parts of a human; the Bible never chop up the person into pieces but rather sees body and soul as two sides of the same coin; they are not mutually exclusive. The Bible speaks of both body and soul experiencing the affects of the Fall. After Adam and Eve disobeyed, but before they were confronted by God, the first affect of the Fall was disordered bodily sexuality. Whereas before the first sin Adam and his wife enjoyed each other’s nakedness without any shame, after they ate from the forbidden tree, their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked, prompting embarrassing shame from them both. Our bodies experience the ruinous affects of sin. Moreover, both prior to and after the great flood, God acknowledged that the *heart* of humanity was inherently evil, an aspect of the human experience the psalmist says begins at our conception.

In Romans 8 Paul writes that we eagerly await the final redemption of our bodies, when everything about our bodies that still miss the mark of what we were created to be will be brought into full expression. The prophet Jeremiah tells us the human heart is the source of all self-deceit and Jesus bluntly says all evil flows from the human heart. It is the heart that must be changed. Thus, Moses told the Israelites that it was their *hearts* that needed to be circumcised more than anything else. Thus, the New Covenant connects salvation with the reception of a new heart. Do you notice that it is not the body but rather the heart or soul that is immediately changed at conversion? Once the heart is changed by God, thus enabling someone to put their faith in Christ and receive the permanent resident of the Holy Spirit, their body becomes that house. The fact that the body that houses the Holy Spirit does *not* require immediate change communicates to us the incredible value God places on the human body.

The bodily significance to human existence was decisively declared when God became flesh by taking on the form of man. Jesus was a real person, a real male, with all the normal abilities and inabilities that come with being a male, such as smelly body odor as a teenager, the

⁶ Lady Gaga is largely reacting against her Catholic upbringing. I interact with Gaga’s “Born this Way” theology as it pertains to original sin in an unpublished paper. We may feel tempted to push back against this idea by taking the opposite approach: downplaying the soul and elevating the body; however, this also would be unbiblical.

ability to grow facial hair, and the inability to get pregnant. If ever anyone could have claimed their true self was trapped in a body it could have been Jesus, but we don't get that from him. For he chose to take on our flesh to dwell among us, and in doing so fulfilled God's messianic prophecy of a divine King from the body of David who would also reign forever. The significance to the body is seen in the incarnation of Jesus, for if the body was a prison of the soul, then the apparent vileness of the body would tarnish the holiness of God or at least limit the amount of God able to be contained within such a body. But that's not how the incarnation is described. Paul twice tells the Colossians that *the fullness* of God dwelled in Messiah's body.

Thus, Jesus' bodily suffering for us was significant. Paul writes in our passage that the reason our bodies are temples—the reason the Holy Spirit is within us—is because we were bought with a price. Peter says something similar in his exposition of the Gospel when he writes that we were purchased or ransomed from futility with the precious blood of Messiah (1 Pet. 1:18-19). John also writes something similar in Revelation 5:9, emphasizing the purchase of God's people with the blood of Jesus.⁷ When God took on human flesh, he took on human flesh as human flesh was created to be, and after living a life of perfect obedience, Jesus took upon himself the totality of God's wrath deserved by sinful man by dying *bodily*. On the third day, Jesus was raised from the dead; a *bodily* resurrection in which his disciples could see and touch the crucifixion wounds on his *body*. Then Jesus ascended *bodily* to the divine throne room in heaven where he remains *bodily* until he comes again. The entire story of our redemption is flooded with significance to the *body*. Any worldview or theological system that downplays the *body* must downplay the Gospel along the way. We were bought with a price; the price of God's own son murdered by the evil desires of the human heart to create our own definition of existence and cancel anyone who threatens our supposed autonomy.

All this does not mean, however, that *only* our hearts need to be changed. “It's within reason to be a sinner, have a proclivity toward a certain sin and still agree with God that the sin you enjoy is wrong. That's logically possible. Reject the idea that because your sin is pleasurable to you that God is wrong about it.”⁸ “Desires for things God has forbidden are a reflection of

⁷ This word in our passage for “price” is more consistently rendered as “honor” in the NT, such as only a few verses down in Revelation 5:13: *To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and power forever.* To be bought with a price is to be bought with the very thing that earned Jesus his status as king—his blood.

⁸ Charlie Dates, via Twitter – June 16, 2021.

how sin has distorted [us], not how God has made [us].”⁹ Our bodies need changing as well, and the immediate change that comes to our bodies after we are converted is in how we use them. This is what our passage refers to in its final instruction to glorify God with your body.

The transformative power of the Gospel affects both body and soul because both body and soul need changing. What needs changing in our heart or soul can only be changed by the initiative of God in replacing our evil heart with a new heart. What needs changing in our bodies is changed by our walking in step with the Holy Spirit, by engaging in bodily activities God has blessed and abstaining from bodily activities God has forbidden. John Newton famously said that “everything God sends is necessary; nothing God withholds is necessary.” A fundamental reality of the Christian life is that the body of every believer is a literal temple of the Holy Spirit, and as temples it is incumbent upon us to guard the holiness of our bodies with the same meticulous care God’s priests were instructed to guard other sacred spaces. How we respond to the necessary gifts and the unnecessary withholdings of God as they pertain to the body is how we glorify God with our bodies.

This advent season, let us reflect on the significant the incarnation of Jesus assigns to our bodies as God’s people; as members of his body, itself a temple. And let us repent from the ways we have disregarded this significance, proceeding instead by using our bodies to glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Messiah.

Let’s pray.

⁹ Sam Allberry, via Twitter – May 20, 2022. This quote also appears in his book *Is God Anti-Gay* (The Good Book Company, 2015); however, I have no page number because I pulled the quote from Twitter not the book.