

Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church
Epiphany 2
January 14, 2018
Glorify God with your body
Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer

—1 Corinthians 6:12-20

“Male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number’” (Gen 1). “A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen 2). Human sexuality is an awesome creation of God. That the human body, in connection with a body of the opposite sex, is able to reproduce itself and make a new human life, that’s awesome. Add to that what becoming “one flesh” means in all its dimensions—the oneness in body and mind, in emotions and human love—and it makes human sexuality even more awesome. And all of it comes out of the mind and imagination and the creative power of God. Along with creating human sexuality, God also created the parameters, the borders, within which the full capabilities of human sexuality are properly used. Marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman, and after that marriage bond is established with a public “I do,” then husband and wife share sexual intimacy and become one flesh without shame in a way that God says is good. And should God grant children to that union, then husband and wife may consider themselves doubly blessed by a gracious God.

Compare all that with the prevailing attitudes toward the human body and its sexual capabilities. The society around you has no single way of looking at all this—certainly the range can run all the way from prudish to perverse—but if you pay any attention to your society’s advice through its advertising, its news reporting, its literature, its legislation, and through its entertainment, I think you can come up with a pretty good idea of the prevailing attitudes about the human body and sex. “Your body is yours. Do with it what you want. In fact, don’t let anyone else tell you what to do with your body. Just don’t hurt anybody else” (whatever that means). “Sex is like an appetite. If you get hungry, naturally you eat. So if you want to have sex, then do that. Just makes sure it is consensual, that the other person wants it too. But protect yourself. Protect yourself from unwanted disease and from unwanted pregnancy.” And the two aren’t all that far apart. “Because if you do get a disease, you can treat that with medication, and if you do get pregnant or you cause a pregnancy, you have every right to treat that pregnancy with abortion. Especially if you are a woman, that thing growing inside you is not a person, legally speaking, it’s a part of your body, and you may terminate it at will, the earlier in the pregnancy the better. If you are attracted to people of the same sex as you, then again, go ahead and express that. Your homosexual intimacy and your homosexual marriage is on the same plane as heterosexuality, equal to any marriage between a male husband and a female wife. Whoever you are, love who you want, and make love to whomever you will.”

There were people in the Christian congregation of Corinth who had once bought into society’s prevailing attitudes toward the body and sexuality. If you had looked into the faces of some of those congregation members, you would have seen people who were once in bed with someone even though they were not married to that person. You would have seen people who had once paid for sex with prostitutes. People who had committed adultery, either by having a sexual relationship with someone else outside their marriage or by carrying on a sexual relationship with someone who was married to someone else. You would have looked into the faces of people who once lived a homosexual lifestyle. And while in that lifestyle, some of them had filled the stronger, more masculine role in the homosexual partnership, while the others had filled the softer, more effeminate role in the relationship. Either way, they had done things with their bodies that human bodies were never created to do. These were now some of the people who made up the Christian congregation at Corinth, along with other people who had lived wicked lives: pagan idol worshipers, greedy thieves and swindlers, drunks, gossips, to name a few. Those who had sinned sexually learned by experience the bitter, shameful reality of their sins: *All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.* There’s an added dimension to sexual sin. It disgraces your own flesh and bones. It violates your body and the purpose for which your body was made. The human body was not made to have sex with anyone and everyone. The male body was meant to be intimate with a wife. The female body was made to be intimate with a husband.

So how could people who had done such wicked things with their bodies now be a part of the Christian congregation at Corinth? Paul said, “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.” Before Paul wrote this letter, he had spent 18 months doing mission work in Corinth. He knew many of these people by face and by name, and he knew what their

lives had once been like too. But through his mission work, sinners were brought to a recognition of their sinful ways, and they found the solution for their guilt and shame: their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He suffered and died to take away the sin of the world, their sin too. God's Spirit took the saving work of Jesus and applied it personally to them. They were washed clean of sin. Their sins, already suffered for by Jesus, were separated from them, and they became holy saints in the eyes of God. They were justified. Freed from guilt and shame because God said so for the sake of Jesus Christ. In other words, they became Christians.

Interesting words used by Paul. Washed, sanctified, justified. Words that the Bible also connects to baptism. "Get up, be baptized, and *wash your sins away*," Paul himself was once told in Damascus by Ananias. Later, Paul reminded the Christian husbands in Ephesus how "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her *to make her holy [to sanctify her]*, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word." Then, Paul reminded Titus what baptism did for both Paul and Titus. "God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...so that, *justified* by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." If sexual sin has been a part of your past, and you have sinned against your own body, then take special comfort from your baptism. Your God had water applied to your body along with his Word, and he washed away your sins, he cleansed you and made you holy, he said you have no more guilt to worry about. Because you have a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So now what? What were the Corinthians supposed to do with their bodies going forward? What are we supposed to do with our bodies going forward? Paul gives a top five list. Considering how important it is for us to flee the temptations all around us, this top five list is worth learning and memorizing.

Number one. *The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.* You have a Lord who created you. He is the Creator. You are his creation. Your body is meant to serve his purposes. He determines how your body is to be used. So glorify God with your body.

Number two. *By his power God raised the Lord from the dead and he will raise us also.* If you want to know how highly God regards these bodies of ours, then just think about the two highlights of every worship year. We just celebrated Christmas. The eternal Son of God took on a human body. That was more than a temporary arrangement, it was an everlasting commitment, because God the Son remains a human being to this day, and he will remain a human being forevermore. God with a human body and soul—that's Jesus. But if you want to know God's highest regard for these bodies of ours, you celebrate Easter. After Jesus died for our sins, God brought his body back from the dead, raised him back to life out of the grave. And God is going to do the same for these bodies of ours. They are not disposable. They are not temporary. He intends for these bodies of ours to be raised from the dead and live forever on the other side of the grave. If he has such a high regard for our bodies, then we should have the same. So glorify God with your body.

Number three. *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 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."* Be who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Paul often uses this organic picture to describe the Christian church and its relationship with Christ. Christ is the head of the body. Christians are the body. Take that a step further, and you could say that every Christian is an individual body part. A *member* of Christ. Christ's finger or Christ's kneecap or Christ's hipbone. Taking a body part that belongs to Christ and misusing it for sexual sin is unthinkable. You are a body part that belongs to Christ. So glorify God with your body.

Number four. *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?* If the Holy Spirit took on a visible form and stayed in your house every day and every night, would it affect the way you behaved? If he had a place at your dinner table, if he sat on your living room couch, if he did projects in the garage, played in your backyard, and had a place to sleep on the floor of your bedroom, would you think a little more carefully about what you did with your body? Well, God the Holy Spirit does not visibly live in your home. He invisibly lives in you. He has set up sacred space within your body, and he loves living there. As Christians, we love having him there. He is a tremendous gift to us from God the Father and God the Son. King David understood this. After David had committed his well-known sexual sin, and after God graciously brought David back to repentance and to renewed faith, the last thing David ever wanted to leave was the Holy Spirit. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence, [do not] take your Holy Spirit from me." The Holy Spirit dwells in your body in a wonderful and mysterious way. So glorify God with your body.

Number five. Aand the final reason in Paul's list. Simply put, *You are not your own; you were bought at a price.* It counters that sassy argument that my body is mine and I'll do with it as I please. No. No. Your body really isn't

yours. It belongs to somebody else. Paul doesn't even name who bought it, or how much that person paid for it. He doesn't have to. We know exactly what he is talking about. Jesus Christ bought our bodies, yours and mine. He bought us back, ransomed us, from being under the everlasting death penalty of God's law. And we know how he did that. He paid a frightful price. Jesus gave his own blood and sacrificed his own life. He bought and paid for our bodies and brought us into God's favor and God's forgiveness. We belong to Christ. So glorify God with your body. Five reasons. Your body is meant for the Lord. God is going to raise your body from the dead. Your body is a body part of Christ. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body. And oh, by the way, have you noticed? The body that is not your own is yours. It belongs to God three times over. He created it. He bought it with his blood. He claimed it as his special dwelling place. But he has entrusted it to you, along with his awesome creation of its sexual capabilities, to use properly for him and find his blessings in the process. What a gracious God! What more reason could you need to glorify God with your body? Amen.