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I Corinthians 6:12-20  
YOUR BODY BELONGS TO THE LORD

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“May God the Father who created this body; may God the Son who redeemed this body together with the soul; may God the Holy Spirit, who by Holy Baptism sanctified this body to be his temple, keep these remains t the day of the resurrection of all flesh.” These are familiar words, very familiar words. These are the words that I and every Lutheran pastor speak at the committal of a Christian. I put one hand on the casket and speak these words. I say that this body, the very body that is lying in the coffin, will be raised on the Last Day.

These words are words of comfort. This is what we confess as Christians. At death, the soul separates from the body and the body will be placed into the ground. But the time will come when our Lord Jesus returns that all bodies will be raised from the dead and reunited with our souls. Because our Lord Jesus rose bodily from the dead, we have the full confidence that he will raise us up also. We confess that every week in the Creed. “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” That is not something that we hope might happen somehow. That is what we confess as truth since God himself has assured us of that. If we don’t believe in the resurrection, we might as well go home now, because we would have no hope, no peace, no comfort.

We believe that the Lord will raise up our bodies. He is the one who created them. He is the one who bought us back from sin, death, and Satan with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He is the one who brought us to faith in Holy baptism and keeps us in that faith. He does have something to say about our bodies. That is far different from the people who advocate abortion saying, “It’s my body. I have the right to do whatever I want with it, including taking the life of my unborn child.” No, your body is not your body. YOUR BODY BELONGS TO THE LORD.

Of all the congregations that Paul served, the Corinthians were definitely his “problem child.” There were all kinds of cliques and factions. There were problems with social status. There were definitely people who thought that they were better than others in the congregation. Some declared loyalty to a certain pastor. Lawsuits between members of the congregation were a problem. They refused to deal with one another in Christian love and concern. There were questions about the resurrection. And there were all kinds of problems with sexual immorality.

Yes, sexual immorality was a very definite problem in Corinth. Corinth had a reputation as a very dirty city, much like Las Vegas or San Francisco. Already 400 years before Paul, the poet Aristophanes coined the phrase “to behave like a Corinthian,” that is, to be involved in all kinds of sexual immorality. It is said that the temple of Aphrodite employed 1000 temple prostitutes. In Corinth, houses of prostitution were as common as McDonalds, Burger King, and Taco Bell. You went there to fulfill your sexual appetite. That was the way things went in Corinth.

Paul had certainly taught his hearers that sexual immorality, sex outside the bonds of marriage, had no place in the life of a Christian. He taught them that marriage was not a human institution, but rather was designed by a good and gracious God as an unconditional, lifelong union between one man and one woman. Christians are not to live their lives like other people. We are separate. We are different.

Well, there were a number of members of the Corinthian congregation who didn’t believe that or want to believe that. They felt that they were free to do whatever they wanted with their bodies, and if that included visits to

prostitutes, then so be it! They even had a couple of slogans to support their view. The thing was that prostitution was legal in Corinth, and it was socially acceptable for men to have sexual relations both with boys and with prostitutes. No one would think anything bad about you. That was normal in the community.

It was not normal in the Christian community. The advocates of sexual immorality were chanting: "Everything is permissible for me!" They talked about Christian freedom. Now it is true that Christ has set us free from the law. He has set us free from our slavery to sin and from the power of death. But they misunderstood Christian freedom (probably deliberately) as freedom to sin rather than freedom to live by the power of the Holy Spirit to live in accord with God's Law. They are thinking of themselves and themselves alone. Paul corrects them by saying that all things are not beneficial. Not all things will build up the body of Christ, and certainly not sexual immorality.

Another slogan was "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food." In other words, visiting a prostitute was really no different from eating a hamburger. You get hungry, you eat. You want sex, you fulfill that urge. It's as simple as that. In their minds, it was no different.

Paul is going to distinguish bellies from bodies. The belly, representing digestion necessary to sustain life, will pass away, but our bodies will be raised up. "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Your body does not belong to you. It belongs to God. Paul says, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

We know how our Old Adam works. He is totally selfish and self-centered. It is always "I will get my own way, and I will do anything it takes to get it." That is totally opposite from the Christian life that puts aside our own evil desires to show love toward God and toward our fellow man. Our new man in Christ learns to say "No!" to his sinful desires.

Is it easy? Absolutely not. No one ever said that it was or that it will be. I don't know how any man can convince himself that he has kept all the commandments. Has any man ever kept the Sixth Commandment: "You shall not commit adultery?" In his Sermon on the Mount our Lord Jesus tells us: "I tell you that anyone who looks on a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in her heart." Many years ago, President Jimmy Carter quoted that, and the press and others had a field day. People laughed and laughed. Mere lust is adultery? Then every man is guilty. And that is the point. Every man is guilty. There really isn't a whole lot you can do to avoid many places where you are tempted. Movies, television, magazines, and newspapers know that sex sells. They will do as much as possible to tempt you. The internet is also a great source that needs to be closely watched. Some websites sound innocent but draw people away into a web of pornography that is difficult to pull oneself away. And even if you somehow avoid all those things, you will still see women dressed in ways that lead you to sin. Unless you live on a mountain alone with food supplies for years on end, you will encounter the temptation to lust.

We are all tempted to sin and break the Sixth Commandment. But there is a difference between lust and sexual immorality just as there is a difference between hating someone and putting a bullet into his brain because you don't like him. In God's eyes, sin is sin, but there is a difference between sins of thought and sins of deed. There can be serious consequences like unwanted or unexpected pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and plenty of guilt or regret that stays with you.

"Flee from sexual immorality!" Run away! Paul makes the point that it is not easy. We are enticed. We are like flies drawn into a spider's web. We know our own sexual appetites, and if we are honest, they aren't always pretty. We think of Joseph in the Old Testament. The wife of his employer tempted him to sin often. Don't think of her as an old hag who wouldn't attract any man. As a man of wealth and power, I'm sure that Potiphar's wife was very young and extremely attractive. No one else was home. Joseph was a man. She was a woman. Who would ever know? We know what Joseph said. "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" We know what Joseph did. He ran away

from the situation even though it would lead to false accusations against him and going to prison. It definitely would not be an easy thing for Joseph to do, but it would be the right thing. Having sexual relations with another man's wife was wickedness. It was a sin against God.

“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? Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?” Paul speaks repeatedly in the Scriptures of the body. Christians are the body of Christ. Christ is the head. All of us are members who have a specific function in the body. Yes, we are different. We are set apart from the unbelieving world. We are in the world, but we are not to be of the world. In other words, “Everyone else is doing it” does not apply to us.

It is unthinkable that those who have been bought back from their slavery to sin, death, and the power of Satan by Christ would now offer up their bodies to prostitutes. Uniting with a prostitute is much different from gluing two pieces of paper together. In the act of sexual intercourse, two people actually become one. That is what God intended, but only within the prescribed boundaries of marriage. Unmarried sexual partners are bonded together in an unholy union. It desecrates marriage whether we are speaking of prostitution or an affair or living together or homosexuality or lesbianism.

I'm guessing that most Americans today don't visit prostitutes like the Corinthians did. But sexual immorality is just as rampant. Many women don't hold out for a fistful of cash, but they are willing to settle for a nice meal, jewelry, or other things. I don't even think that they would think of themselves as prostitutes. They just do what everyone else in the world is doing.

You can't stop a bird from flying over your head. You can stop it from making a nest in your hair. We will always be tempted to sin sexually, and we will fall prey to lusts. Our Savior died to forgive those sins. But we must not let sin master us. When our Lord Jesus met a woman who was caught in adultery, he did not tell her that everything was fine because everyone else was doing it. He didn't beat her with the law either. He freed her with the power of forgiveness. He sent her off with a new dignity and empowered her to go and sin no more. Adultery is a sin that all of us know so well, whether it is adultery of the mind, heart, speech, or action. We repent of our sin. We ask the Lord for forgiveness for our filthy thoughts and actions and we see Christ's response on the cross. Yes, go and sin no more!

Your body does not belong to you. It belongs to God. That body is God's temple that he will raise up on the Last Day. Flee from sexual immorality and glorify God in your body! AMEN.