

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (14)

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Introduction.

“Man is surely stark raving mad. He can’t make a worm but he makes gods by the dozen.” (Montaigne). We have been looking at **“Unity in the body of Christ and certain sins”**. Over the last few weeks we studied the sins of idolatry and the unequal yoke and the impact they have on the body of Christ. This morning I want to turn our attention to the third sin that impacts the body of Christ. That sin is sexual immorality.

Sexual Immorality And The Body Of Christ.

Please turn to *1Cor.6:15-18*. (read). Paul is dealing here with the philosophy of Greek dualism that had taken root in the Corinthian church. This teaching says you are a physical body and a spiritual being. Your physical body, which is corrupt, is not the real you. The real you is spiritual, pure and incorruptible and cannot be tainted by your corrupt physical body. You can do whatever you want with your physical corrupt body. The sins you commit with your physical corrupt body will never contaminate the pure spiritual you.

Today, you often hear this dualistic view of the human being in Evangelical / Pentecostal funerals. People are told that the dead person lying in the casket is not the real person. That’s only the physical house the real person lived in. Death means the real person has left his physical house. This view of the body is not Biblical. You will also hear this

dualistic view when Christians want to spiritualize and excuse their absence from the gathering of the church on the Lord's Day. They say, "*I was not there in body but I was there in spirit.*" I guess you would have heard the story of the pastor who once preached a very stirring sermon on the Lord's Day to a church full of spirits.

In the passage before us Paul is describing your conversion to Christ as union with Christ. Paul is saying that when you were converted to Christ you became a member of Christ, that is, of Christ's body. Now, there are those who try to spiritualize this truth by saying that your union with Christ and your membership in Christ's body are purely spiritual. But Paul is arguing against this. Paul's point in this passage is that you entire being, inclusive of your physical body, has become united to Christ and a member or an organ in the body of Christ. Note the question in *vs.15* : "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" Paul would use this "do you not know" formula ten times in *1Cor.* (*3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19, 9:13, 24*). The formula expresses Paul's deep frustration over the conduct of the Corinthians that flew in the face of all that the apostle had carefully taught them.

When Christ died to redeem you, He did not redeem only your soul. He redeemed you as a whole person. That redemption included your body. In the process of salvation God did not overlook the values of the body. There is a day coming, as made clear in *Rom.8:23*, when the redemption of our bodies will be completed. In the interim the picture is this : our bodies are united to Christ; our bodies belong to Christ; our bodies are members of Christ's body; our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

In *vs.20* Paul says, "You have been bought with a price : therefore glorify God in your body." The word "**you**" is focusing on you as a whole person, not just as a spiritual being. The verb "**bought**" is the language of the slave market. "**Bought**" says a change of ownership has taken place. "**Bought**" says the title deed to you, your body included, has been transferred to another. "**Bought**" says "you are not your own"

(*vs.19*). You do not have the ownership rights over your body. Who bought you? Christ bought you. He bought you with a price. *1Pet.1:19* says the price is His precious blood.

Having bought you and now owning you, Christ has made your body a member of His body, a part of His body, an organ in His body. Christ has also constituted your body into a temple. As we noted last week, the word “**temple**” is literally “**sanctuary**” and was used to refer to the holy of holies in the Jewish temple, the place where God’s presence dwelt. Your body is the new holy of holies and the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in your body. In view of all these truths regarding your body, Paul’s command to you is : “glorify God in your body.” In the context Paul specifically applied his command to the sin of sexual immorality. But the command itself has broader application and must not be restricted to sexual immorality. In all aspects of our lives we must glorify God in our bodies.

Now, with reference to the specific application to sexual immorality, here is Paul’s question : “Shall I take away the members of Christ and make them the members of a prostitute?” The specific problem in the church at Corinth was sexual immorality being committed by members of the church with prostitutes. Paul’s answer to the question is the emphatic, “May it never be!” “**Not at all!**”. Why it is that Paul is so adamant that the Corinthian Christians must never become guilty of sexual immorality? The sin of sexual immorality takes away the members of Christ’s body and joins them to your sexually immoral partner.

Let me put it this way : when you become joined to sexual immorality, you have also joined the members of Christ’s body to your sexual immorality. When you commit sexual immorality you are sinning against yourself; you are sinning against your own physical body; you are sinning against Christ; you are sinning against the body of Christ, that is, this church. When a Christian commits sexual immorality he drags Christ and His church into his sin and joins Christ and His church to his sin. The enormity of the sin is great.

Paul's reaction against it is strong. And God's judgment of it is certain.

It is for this reason Paul commanded the Corinthians and all of us, : "Flee immorality." Be continually fleeing from immorality. Paul's command is not limited to sexual immorality with a prostitute. The command calls upon us to flee from any and every kind of sexual immorality. The command is emphatic and pressed upon us with urgency. There must be no wavering here. In the words of **Gordon Fee**, "[You] must absolutely 'flee from sexual immorality'." Paul declared in *Eph.5:3* that sexual immorality "must not even be named among you." The command is literally, "let it not even be mentioned among you."

I want to make another application here that is unrelated to sexual immorality. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells inside your physical body. Paul made it clear that if the Spirit of Christ is not dwelling in you, you are not a Christian. (*Rom.8:9*). Yet, very sadly, we often live as if we are not indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. If Jesus came to visit your home for a week, how would you live? Where would you take Him out to eat? Where would you take Him for a "lime"? What kind of conversations would you have if He were a part of your evening of fellowship with other Brethren? I want to say to you that Jesus is not planning to come to your home to visit for a week. Now that's a great relief!!! I am afraid that's not a relief. Jesus is not planning to visit your home. He is living in your home because He has taken up residence by His Spirit in your physical body. Brethren, we must be ever conscious of this fact and live in accord with this fact.

In closing our study of this third sin, I want to exhort all of us : let us take to heart the warnings in God's word against the sins of idolatry, the unequal yoke and sexual immorality and their impact on the body of Christ. But let us not make the mistake of only putting off these sins. Let us continually put on those moral qualities that will glorify God. Let us seek, day by day, to glorify God in our bodies because our bodies are the members

of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Functioning Of The Body Of Christ.

Let us return now to *1Cor.12*. You are the body of Christ. *Vs.27* says, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” You became a member of the body of Christ through conversion to Christ and through Christ baptizing you in the Holy Spirit. (*vs.13*). Now, by way of review, I want to re-emphasize a few facts. The body is Christ’s body. The body belongs to Christ. He bought it. He owns it. He is the Head of the body, His church.

The body is one body but it has many members. (*vs.12*). There is unity in its plurality. There is plurality in its unity. Your identity as an individual is not lost. But you cannot and must not practice individualism in the body of Christ. Jesus said, “the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.” (*Matt.13:34*). Beware of the language of individualism. If you cannot speak without hesitation and with a sense of true comfort about the church being our church and my church, you need to examine your heart.

The church is not perfect and its members are not perfect. But they are the members of Christ’s body. Christ has accepted them and identified Himself with them. Have you accepted them and identified yourself with them? Christ loves them. Do you love them? Christ is comfortable in calling them “My sheep” (*Jn.10:27*), “My friends” (*Jn.15:14*); “My disciples” (*Jn.8:31*). *Heb.2:11* says “He is not ashamed to call them

brethren.” Are you comfortable in calling them, **“my brethren”**?

Can you comfortably introduce someone in this church to an unsaved friend, neighbor or relative with these words, *“Meet So & So, she is my sister in Christ.” “Meet So & So, he is my brother in Christ.”* What if your unsaved associate says to you later, *“She is a Christian!” “He is a Christian! I do not believe it.”* What would be your response? Would it be an embarrassed silence? Would you want to find out from your unsaved associate the reason for their negative declarations? Would you be hoping to hear some juicy tidbits of gossip?

Or would you be able to say, *“Yes I know. She isn’t perfect. He isn’t perfect. And I am not perfect. But you know what? Christ has accepted us. Christ has forgiven and saved us. Christ loves us. Christ knows that we have many faults, many sins, many imperfections. And Christ is working on all of us, making us into better Christians. We are all at different points in that process. But there is a grand and wonderful day coming when we will no longer be imperfect. On that day Christ’s work in us will be finished and we will be completely and gloriously perfect.”* Would you be able to do this? What kind of impact will it have on the person listening to you? The problem is we are all too ready to join in and become a part of the negative criticisms being made.

I want to say a word here to the adults and / or to those who are farther along in their Christian maturity in Christ. Never forget Paul’s words in *1Cor.15:10*, “by the grace of God I am what I am.” Your growth in Christ has not been and will never be magical. It is rooted in Christ’s grace towards you, Christ’s great patience with you and patient pastoral dealings with you. It grieves me deeply when I hear you being critical and condemning of those who are young in the faith and / or young in age. In *2Cor.10:8* Paul said the Lord’s work given to him was for building up and not for destroying. It is always easy to destroy. It is hard work to build.

I ask you to follow the example of the Lord Jesus who did not write off Peter when Peter cursed and swore and denied Him. Instead the Lord lovingly restored Peter. (*Matt.26:69-75; Jn.21:15-17*). I ask you to follow the example of Paul who did not write off the Corinthian church, a church filled with many evils, a church that wickedly slandered the apostle. Instead he labored to restore them. I ask you in the name of our blessed Lord to manifest Christ-likeness and come alongside the young and lovingly correct them and build them up and give them the guidance they need. They need you and you will be surprised to know that you need them. Sometimes, approach is everything. I ask you to labor in prayer for them. I ask you to show them the more excellent way (cf. *1Cor.12:31b*) by word and very importantly by example.

Why do I ask you? They also belong to Christ. They are Christ's little ones. Jesus said, "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea." (*Matt.18:6*). I ask you because they also are a part of Christ's body and therefore a part of you. They are your little brothers. They are your little sisters. If they are weak, you are being impacted by their weakness. If they are sinning, you are being impacted by their sins. I ask you because they are the future. This church will need them just as it needs you today. They will need to become kingdom builders just as you. You will need to challenge them and guide them into becoming faithful kingdom builders through whatever God makes them in this world and in whatever He blesses them with. You may even need to identify talents and abilities that are similar to your own and help develop these talents and abilities.

I want to say to the young, remember that you are young in age and young in the faith. You may be a young adult. You may be a young married couple. These things do not change the fact that you are young spiritual and morally. You are lacking in experience, in wisdom and in discernment. There is a big difference between being **20** to **30** years and **40** to **60** years. There is a big difference between being married for one year and being

married for **25** years.

And so I say to you who are young, keep suppressing, keep holding down of your arrogance. Get rid of your know-it-all attitude. You say, “*But Pastor, I am not arrogant.*” My response is : you need to confess that lie to the Lord and ask Him to forgive you. Get rid of your fantasies. Continually seek to conduct yourself in a humble manner. Live realistically. Be teachable and stop being defensive and super-sensitive when someone is trying to help you. Seek to learn from others. Build bridges with those you can learn from. If you have messed up, made mistakes, be open about them. Humbly acknowledge your failures and express your desire to be corrected, to be led, to be taught. Holy transparency is your strength, not your weakness.

It is my earnest prayer that in the week ahead I will hear of mature believers seeking out and meeting with younger believers, that I will hear of younger believers seeking out and meeting with mature believers, that I will hear of sins being confessed and broken walls being rebuilt and broken relationships being mended, that I will hear of attempts being made to build with Christ-like care. When I do hear of these things and more, maybe then I will believe that God is answering our prayers and revival has begun in this church.

Having said these things, let us turn our attention now to *1Cor.12*. As we study you would realize that I may have made applications before doing the exposition. The **first** point I want to set before you is the fact of our equality in importance and dignity in the body of Christ. There is no superiority and inferiority in the body of Christ. This was a problem in the church at Corinth. Some felt they were superior and others were inferior. They even went as far as dividing the apostles as inferior apostles and super-apostles. (*2Cor.11:5; 12:11*). And they had classified Paul as an inferior apostle. Paul asked the Corinthians in *1Cor.4:7*, “who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

You are a Christian because you received salvation as a free gift in Christ from God. You received the free gift of salvation because of God's gracious choice of you from eternity. You received the free gift of salvation because you repented of your sins and put your faith in the Lord Jesus to save you. You are growing and maturing in Christ because God is sanctifying you. You do not have health because you are dieting and exercising. You have health because God has given to you health. You are alive because God is keeping you alive. Shall I go on? The list would be infinite. The fact is, we have nothing to boast about before God. We are all sinful beggars standing with open hands before God. As your pastor I am a beggar telling you, a congregation of beggars, how to find grace and spiritual bread from God.

Turn to *Lk.15:4-5*. (**read**). You were that one important lost sheep. The brother / sister behind you was that one important lost sheep. The brother / sister in front of you was that one important lost sheep. I was that one important lost sheep. Herein lies your importance to Christ and my importance to Christ. Your importance and dignity in Christ is rooted in God's eternal plans and decrees concerning you in the work of Christ's redemption. Your importance and dignity is rooted in Christ leaving heaven's glory to come to seek you, find you and save you. When Christ came to die, He came to die for you, and you, and you and me. He did not come to die for you first, and for you second, and for you third, and for me last. There is equality of importance and dignity for the members of the body of Christ.

Secondly, there is inequality in gifts, abilities and functioning in the body of Christ. Let us read *1Cor.12:4-18*. The key verses here are *vss.11 & 18*. (**read**). *Vs.28* uses the expression, "God has appointed in the church...." Turn to *Rom.12:3-6*. (**read**).

Let us note carefully the sovereignty of God in these passages before us. *1Cor.12:11* tells us that the Spirit of God distributes to each one individually "just as He wills" or "**just**

as He determines.” The gifts you have to function in and serve the body of Christ have nothing to do with what you want or what you think you merit. It has to do with the sovereign will of God. *Vs.18* states, “God has placed the members, each one of them, just as He desired”, or **“just as He wanted”** or *“just as He willed.”* *Vs.28* says, “God has appointed.” In *Rom.12:3* Paul said firstly, “for through the grace given to me.” Who gave this grace to Paul? God did. Paul said secondly, “God has allotted to each a measure of faith” or more literally, **“God has measured to each a measure of faith.”** In all these verses the clear emphasis is on God’s sovereign actions.

You may be in God’s church a one-gift person or a multi-gifted person. That has to do with God and not with you. Your *first* responsibility is to discover, develop and put to use the gift or gifts God has given to you in His church. A great deal of the development of a gift takes place in its use. Sometimes other gifts are discovered after a period of putting to use the gifts you already have.

Your *second* responsibility is to humbly submit yourself to God’s sovereign and wise dealings with you. I want to emphasize this : all of God’s dealings with you are sovereign and wise. Humble submission rules out jealousy, envy and destructive criticisms. Now, you may aspire to function in a certain area in the church. But it may not be God’s will that you function in that area. Once you know it is not God’s will to function in a particular area, humble submission means you must stop. You must not test God. If you do, God will stop you and / or judge you. The testimony borne concerning the woman who anointed Jesus’ body before His death is, “She has done what she could.” (*Mk.14:8*). God does not ask you to do what you cannot do. God requires that you do what you could do because He has gifted you to do it and He will supply you with the strength to do it.

Thirdly, constantly keep in mind that God has gifted you to serve in His church for the common good of the church (*1Cor.12:7*). In *Eph.4:12* we are told that God has given

gifts for “the building up of the body of Christ.” God has not gifted you to elevate you. God has not gifted you to glorify you. Turn to *1Pet.4:10-11*. (**read**). Note carefully Peter’s emphasis : “employ it in serving one another”; “do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies”; and finally, the glory must go to God. In the church we are servants, Christ’s servants and we serve Christ by serving one another.

Fourthly, beware of the sin of pride or haughtiness. Turn to *Rom.12:3*. (**read**). **James Denney** wrote, *“To himself, every man is in a sense the most important person in the world, and it always needs much grace to see what other people are, and to keep a sense of moral proportion.”* The most important verb in this verse is **“think”**. It is used four times. It is used two times as simply **“to think”**. And it is used twice as a compound word : “to think more highly”; “to have sound judgment”. When Paul uses the verb **“to think”**, he has more in mind than simple thinking. Paul’s focus is on the direction of your thinking, the way in which you view something, a person or yourself. He is focusing on thinking that reveals your mind-set or your attitude.

The verb “to think more highly” also means **“to think above or beyond; to be haughty”**. In Paul’s Greek sentence the word “beyond” is also used. It makes the sentence awkward but it makes the point : “not to think more highly [of himself] beyond what is logically necessary.” The verb “to have sound judgment” also means **“to be of sound mind; to be reasonable; to be sensible; to keep a proper measure; to not go beyond set boundaries.”** The verb calls on you to turn the energy of your mind to recognize its limits and respect them.

With regards to the gifts and abilities God has graciously given to you for service in His church, for the good of His church, for the building up of His church, and for the glory of His name, Paul is saying that you must not think too highly of yourself. God has measured out to you your measure. Keep your mind within the necessary logic of that

measure. Do not become haughty. Fear God and keep humble before God because pride goes before a fall. Recognize the limits God has placed upon you, humbly embrace those limits, respect those limits and function within those limits. In Paul's inspired view haughty people do not have sound minds. They are not reasonable people. They are irrational people. Bluntly put, they are mad people because they are seeking to break through the barriers God has set around them.

Lastly, God will judge you and reward you based upon your faithfulness. He will not judge you and reward you based on the number of gifts He graciously gave to you. In *Lk.12:48* Jesus said, "from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." Turn to *Matt.25:14-30*. (**read**).

This parable is about the kingdom of heaven and tells us about three slaves to whom their master entrusted his possessions. The first slave was given five talents of silver. The second slave was given two talents of silver. And the third slave was given one talent of silver. The first slave invested and made another five talents. The second slave invested and made another two talents. The third slave failed to invest. Instead he dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Both slaves who invested were rewarded for their faithfulness. The master said to each one, "Well done, good and faithful slave".

The third slave excused his failure to invest by saying he was afraid. But fear was a poor excuse. Instead his master described him as wicked and lazy. Note the contrast : good & faithful; wicked & lazy. Now note carefully the judgment imposed on this slave. *Vs.30* (**read**). The judgment pictures for us eternal punishment in hell. It is an utterly serious matter for you to fail to discover, develop and use your gifts for service in God's church, for the good of His church, for the building up of His church, and for the glory of His name. Regardless of the excuses you may put forward, your failure ultimately reveals that you are a wicked, lazy person who was not saved.

There is no room for spectators in God's church. Every member must be active and must actively contribute to the growth and good of the church. This is God's design for the church. This is God's will for every member in the church. Are you obeying God's will? You say, *"I do not know what my gifts are."* Beyond the gifts there are the commands of Scripture. Begin to obey God's commands. Lord willing, I will develop this point next week.

Let me use one illustration as I close. Worshipping the Lord on the Lord's day is not a spectator sport. You are not here to watch, to be entertained and to applaud your entertainers. God requires that you be actively involved in worshipping Him when we gather on the Lord's Day. You must sing the songs of praise to Him. But how should you sing? You must sing heartily. You must sing joyfully. You must sing with thanksgiving. And if you say you can't sing, then make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Do you sing to the Lord as He requires to the glory of His name?

Do you join in and read the congregational reading? Do you actively follow as the word of God is read by one of the men? Do you open your Bible? At the end of these readings you should get in the habit of saying a hearty "Amen". Do you actively listen to the prayers and say a hearty "Amen" at the end. We should be hearing in this church waves of "Amens" during these times. Do you actively listen to the preaching? Do you listen attentively, carefully, seeking understanding? Serving God is not a spectator sport. It requires that you be actively involved.

Lord willing, next week I will seek to expand on how you can get involved. Let us bow in meditation as we close.

