

PREFACE

Exactly three chapters earlier (3:16-17), Paul was making a similar point as regards the church—the *collective* of believers—that he makes here regarding the individual believer.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

The “you” in 3:16 is plural, and in that context Paul is speaking of the *church* being a temple in which the Spirit of God dwells. Now, in this final paragraph of Chapter Six, he speaks of the *individual*—specifically, the *body* of the individual—as a temple of God’s Holy Spirit.

In vv12-14—indeed, from v9—the apostle has been setting the stage for the direct, powerful, and even astonishing argument he makes in vv15-20. To a people, many of whom were born and raised in the Corinthian society and culture, what Paul says in this passage would truly come as a shock. To him, and to God, the act of lying with a prostitute was not a harmless payment-for-services-rendered transaction, but represented a cosmic conflict between competing lords. As David Garland puts it,

Hiring a prostitute for sex essentially denies Christ’s ultimate sovereignty by filching what belongs to Christ and handing it over to one who belongs to Satan.

And as I said when we began this paragraph, we can *all* draw application from this. We cannot say, *Well, since I’ve never visited a prostitute, I’m OK. This has nothing to do with me.* No, the point being made here is applicable to any number of situations where we might compromise the lordship of Christ in our lives.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.

v15

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

Paul’s use of this rhetorical device—“Do you not know...”—a total of ten times in this letter, but only once more, in one other letter ([Romans 6:16](#)), is an indicator of his level of exasperation with the Corinthians. Here he uses it to reinforce the point that not just the church, but each individual in the church are members of Christ.

The more I study God’s word the more amazed I am by God’s creative economy for the salvation of man in and through Christ Jesus, for it is utterly unique in the history of man and the countless gods he has worshiped. In its structure, its complexity, its poetry, it is genius—*of course*: He is God!

We in the church so casually throw around the phrase “body of Christ,” but rarely think it through—especially the circuitous genius of it. And here the apostle is helping us sort it out, using sexual immorality—specifically, visiting a prostitute—as the means.

Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!

Paul is employing colorful imagery here to illustrate the absurdity of this notion. Among our common translations only the NASB captures the fullness of the word *airo*.

take away^{nasb}, **take** = *airo* = a primary verb; **to lift; by implication to take up or away;** figurative to raise (the voice), keep in suspense (the mind); specially **to sail away (i.e. weigh anchor)**; by Hebrew [compare <H5375> (*nasa'*)] to expiate sin :- away with, bear (up), carry, lift up, loose, make to doubt, put away, remove, take (away, up).

Two other uses of this same word illustrate the difference between “take” and “take away.” First the familiar scene with John the Baptist.

Read John 1:29.

Then how the apostle John described Jesus in his first epistle.

Read 1 John 3:5.

If I just “take” something, I probably keep it for myself. But where it came to taking our sins, Christ Jesus did not keep them for Himself, He took them *away*—“as far as the east is from the west...” ([Psalm 103:12](#)). But there is still more to Paul’s imagery here in this context. Consider this: Today it is relatively common to “take away members” of a deceased person to be given to a living person—vital organs, skin grafts, etc. But Paul turns this around to show the absurdity of the situation in Corinth. What if I had my right arm removed and had it “joined” to (v17) a cadaver! How ridiculous; what a waste. But that is what Paul is saying. When we visit a prostitute, we are taking a living member of Christ’s body—*our* body—and joining it to someone who is in the process of dying—a prostitute serving not Christ, but Satan—and, more to Paul’s reference of resurrection, one whose body will not be “raised incorruptible” ([1 Corinthians 15:52](#)).

And here is revealed one of those marvelous mysteries of God’s plan. Based on the evidence we have been compiling in the last few sessions we understand the beauty and cosmic wonder of the marital union of man and woman, and its illustration of the church in relation to Christ Jesus. And Paul underscores this with graphic clarity in v16.

v16

Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH."

In describing what a man does with a prostitute, Paul uses the same Greek term Jesus did in the gospel of Matthew when He quoted the familiar Genesis passage.

Read Matthew 19:4-6. ("one flesh" = "one body with her")

joins = *kollao* = from *kolla* ("glue"); **to glue**, i.e. (passive or reflexive) **to stick** (figurative) :- **cleave, join** (self), keep company.

Warren Wiersbe: Sex outside of marriage is like a man robbing a bank: he gets something, but it is not his and he will one day pay for it. Sex within marriage can be like a person putting money into a bank: there is safety, security, and he will collect dividends.

I have emphasized how God utilizes sexual immorality to illustrate Israel's worshiping of idols instead of Him only, calling it "adultery." I have also emphasized how the mystical bond between husband and wife, making them "one flesh," is used to illustrate our bond with Christ—as both the corporate church, and the individual within the church. But there is another aspect to this—another way of looking at it. And we see this in v17.

v17

But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

To contrast the situation in vv15-16, the same verb, *kollao*, is used to describe the believer's healthy union with Christ. Here the verb could be translated—as it is in the Septuagint (e.g., Deuteronomy 10:20)—"cling to," or "hold fast" (Garland). The key to understanding this verse is the word "spirit."

Some of the Corinthians were saying that the body was of *no* importance because they were now "spiritual" beings. As the following verses prove, in v17 Paul is not dismissing the importance of the body, but saying that there is a higher relationship for the body: with Christ by the Spirit. As the union of husband and wife is higher than any other human relationship, so the union of believer with Christ is higher than the marital union. It is not physical or sexual, but S/spiritual. And implicit in this verse is the utter horror of thinking one so united with Christ could, with the same body and spirit, join with a prostitute. Unthinkable.

v18

Flee [sexual] immorality.

present imperative verb = "keep running from," a long-term way of doing something, a command to keep on doing something as one's general habit or lifestyle, do it every time it is necessary.

It is the standard go-to passage to illustrate this command, but even though it is familiar to most of us, we must read it again, for it is the perfect picture of what we are commanded to do here. We know the story: Joseph is sold to the pharaoh's captain of the bodyguard, shows himself worthy and ends up running his entire household. But he is a good-looking guy, and Potiphar's wife has the hots for this young Hebrew. One day the house is empty but for Joseph and his master's wife, and she makes her move.

Read Genesis 39:10-12.

There is the obvious illustration at the end of v12: "...he...fled, and went outside." But I want to make sure we see two other important components to this story.

Read v10.

Joseph not only refused to "lie beside her," he refused to even be *in the same room with her*. The best plan for not having to flee temptation is to never let yourself be found near a tempting situation in the first place. But now notice the important reason Joseph refused to give in to such temptation.

Read v9.

There are few temptations more tempting than sexual temptations—for either sex. Put yourself in Joseph's shoes: a good-looking young man, red blood coursing through his veins—a prime candidate. And what would it have cost him? Sure, if his master found out he'd be in trouble, but his wife probably wouldn't tell, and meanwhile Joseph would have a good thing going on. Except that it would be a sin against his God—and that was enough for him to stop the libidinous wife cold in her tracks. And this is what takes us back to 1 Corinthians. This is the tie-in.

Verse 17 says, "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him." Joseph didn't have a wife to be faithful to, but he had a God to be faithful to. And the Christian has an even greater incentive than Joseph; as Paul reminds us in v19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

When we whittle this down to the essentials, what Paul is really talking about is *lordship*: the right of God to *be* our Lord, and our submission to Him *as* Lord.