

The God-Honouring Body

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as Ben has already alluded to, this week and next week in particular, our Bible passages will be talking about matters of sex. Now, I know that talking about sex and things connected with sex can be a bit uncomfortable in our own culture and even in our own churches.

But because that's what the Bible is going to be talking about this week and next week, so that's what we're going to be talking about as well. Yeah, and I wouldn't be distasteful, but I will try to be direct.

And the reason for that is because the Bible itself is pretty direct at times. And actually, we need to be clear on what the Bible says about these kind of matters, because if we're not learning it from the Bible, we are learning it from somewhere else.

And so it's best that we take it from God's word, so that we won't do a disservice to the church as a whole. So just be prepared for that as we look at 1 Corinthians 6, verse 12 to 20 this morning.

Above all, make sure the Bible is open in front of you, and let's ask God for his help. Father, we just come again and we ask again that your word will be speaking to us.

[1 : 1 1] Would you help us, Lord, to clarify our vision this morning? Help us to see what you want us to see. Help us to understand what is your big picture, especially in terms of our bodies and in terms of how we use our bodies.

And above all, Lord, we pray that we will come away wanting to honour you in body and in soul. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. Now as we begin, let me just ask you, how many of you here play Monopoly Deal? If you do, just say so in the comments, but basically it's the card version of Monopoly.

And in this deck, there's a particularly powerful card that everybody hopes to have. It's called Just Say No. Now what's so great about this card? Well, if somebody plays any kind of action card against you, all you have to do is throw down your Just Say No card and it cancels their action. And so if someone's trying to collect double the rent or attempting to steal an entire property set from you, you can smile at them and Just Say No. Now when it comes to sin, especially sexual sin, this is a card that the church likes to play.

[2 : 2 6] Thinking about having sex before marriage? Tempted to click on that link to that pornographic website? Struggling with some voyeuristic tendencies? Then the church says, just say no, play the card, cancel the action.

And sometimes it works. Some of us take a deep breath, exert all our willpower and just say no. But the problem with that is it's not sustainable.

In Monopoly Deal, there's only three such cards in the entire deck, so it won't be long before you run out of them. And similarly, when it comes to sexual temptation, people soon find out that they run out of willpower to keep saying no.

And there's no way that you can win the game with Just Say No cards. In fact, if Monopoly Deal consisted of only Just Say No cards, everyone will soon be asking, what's the point of even playing this game?

There's no meaning or purpose to it. No goal to aim for. And so, unsurprisingly, when it comes to sexual activity, especially outside of marriage, that's what many people have begun to wonder.

[3 : 3 8] What's the point? The purpose? You tell me, just say no? Well, may I ask, why say no? God, if we love one another, why can't we express that already by having sex with one another?

After all, I'm in a faithful, long-term relationship. I'm not doing one-night stands. So, why say no? Oh God, if you created us with sexual urges, then why not let us fulfill them?

We'll do so responsibly, don't worry. It feels cruel of you to create us with sexual desires, only to frustrate them. Why say no? Oh God, why can't I look at anything I want, as long as I'm not hurting

anyone?

Why say no? What's the point of doing so? These are honest questions asked in good faith. But what has happened is that the church has often shrugged their shoulders and said, we don't know. We struggle to answer, and sometimes we resort simply to pragmatic statements. Don't do it, otherwise you might catch a sexually transmitted disease otherwise. Or sometimes we might make statements that are not even biblical.

[4 : 54] You know, if you wait till marriage, your sex life is guaranteed to be better. Or we fall back on that classic Asian parenting statement. Because I said so.

Ayah, the Bible says so lah, that's all you need to know. Why you ask so much? And so sadly, what has happened is that Christians have not heard a coherent and satisfying answer to their question. And if they haven't heard it, you can be sure the world hasn't either. And that's sad, because if people think that all Jesus says to them in this area is, just say no, then a number of them will probably choose to just say no to Jesus as well.

And that's really sad, because if we were to open God's word, we'll find that God says a lot more than just say no. In fact, I hope you'll see that's the case even in just the nine or so verses that we're looking at this morning.

I hope you'll see why we believe what we believe, why there are things we say no to. And I hope you'll see that it's not based on a list of arbitrary do's and don'ts, but emerges out of a rich theology of who God made us to be.

[6 : 13] I hope we'll see from today's passage how the gospel isn't separate from, but profoundly impacts our sexual ethics. You see, we're not the first generation to ask this question.

In the first century, if you're living in Corinth, no one would frown on you for sleeping around. Why say no? This was a place, after all, where you could attend a dinner at the local pagan temple, and afterwards you could decide which prostitute you wanted to see.

Sugar daddies and sugar babies have been in the news lately, but those are not new things. In Corinth, similar kinds of arrangements already existed. And so the Christians were beginning to ask, why should we say no to?

Indeed, some of them believed that there wasn't any reason to. Look at verse 12. I have the right to do anything, some of them were saying. Now this was a catchphrase that was beginning to catch on in the church, possibly adapted from the wider culture.

A 21st century version might go something like this. I have the right to express myself. Why should anyone judge me? Or, my body, my choice.

[7 : 32] No one can dictate to me what I want to do with it. And so they were beginning to buy into the slogans of the world. Some of them probably even gave it a Christian spin.

Was it not for freedom that Christ has set us free? Some of them might have argued. You yourself told us, Paul, that we are no longer under law. Christianity isn't about keeping the rules, right? And so a number of them, it seems, had begun acting like the culture around them. They began visiting prostitutes. And so how is Paul going to deal with all this?

Will he decide that maybe what the Christians in Corinth need is a rule book after all? And that has often been the church's answer. Let's sign a pledge card promising sexual abstinence before marriage.

Let's decide where you can go, what you can watch, who you can hang out with. But the problem with that, of course, is that it only focuses on externals, not the heart.

[8 : 41] It tells you what standards you should maintain, but doesn't help you maintain those standards. And so Paul doesn't give rules. That's not his answer.

Instead, he does two things. He engages in subversion, and then he casts a gospel-shaped vision. So first of all, more briefly, Paul engages in subversion.

Look again at verse 12. I have the right to do anything you say, but not everything is beneficial. Paul says to the Corinthians, For the moment, let's say you're right.

Let's say you indeed have the right to do anything you want. So sure, you could eat McDonald's three times a day, every day if you wanted to. Or you could just sit on the couch, watch TV all the time, never clean your house, if that's what you want.

But is that going to be any good for you? How would that help you? You say you want freedom. But actually, what you really want is freedom that brings benefits.

[9 : 46] No one actually acts as they wish if it brings harm to them. And with this, Paul presses home the point.

He says, Did you know that the kind of sexual freedom you want doesn't actually bring you any benefit? After all, if you use your freedom to invite sin back into your life, did you know that sin won't be content just to be your servant?

No, it wants nothing less than to be your slave master again. And so Paul says, No, thank you.

Verse 12 again. I have the right to do anything, but I will not be mastered by anything.

I'd rather not be mastered by sin again. So why would you? Think about it. Let's take pornography, for example. You know, you think you're free.

You're the one deciding which website to click, what videos to watch, and you can always pull back, right? You're the master. You're the one in charge. But is it really?

[10 : 56] What is watching all those videos doing to your appetites? How is it that sooner or later, you find yourself wanting something more than what you're currently watching, even things that you used to find disgusting?

Why does it rewire your brain to look at others in a certain way? Who is really the master here? And who is the slave?

And so Paul begins to turn the slogan on its head. He's engaging in subversion. Paul now turns more positively towards casting a gospel shape, freedom, he asks.

Here's a thought. What if choice and freedom are not actually the same thing? What if true freedom comes from a different source, a different action?

And so second of all, having engaged in subversion, Paul now turns more positively towards casting a gospel shape vision. He wants to engage our imagination to show us a better way.

[12 : 12] And in particular, Paul wants to cast a gospel shape vision for our bodies. And here are three things he wants us to know. Firstly, your body is meant for resurrection, not destruction.

Now it seems as if another slogan was making its way around Corinth evangelical church. Look at verse 13. Hold on.

You say food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both. Now here's what the Corinthians were saying. What are our stomachs for?

Well, for food, that's it. No other higher purpose. And so similarly, what are our bodies for? For sex. That's it.

There's no higher purpose. Food for the stomach and the stomach for food. Sex for the body and the body for sex. And so if you want to satisfy your physical hunger, you go to your nearest kopitiam.

[13 : 19] And if you want to satisfy your sexual appetites, you just go to your nearest brothel. There's no difference. In the end, these are all just bodily functions, right? What's the big deal?

Why say no when this is simply what bodies are for? If God is going to destroy food and the stomach, well, he's going to destroy sex and body in the same way, right?

So what we do now with our bodies sexually is spiritually insignificant. That's Corinthian logic. And is that not actually the view of many today?

See, many people see their bodies as simply physical things. There's nothing spiritual attached to the meaning of our bodies. And as a result, sexual activity becomes little more than a pursuit for pleasure.

Why say no? As long as we are consenting adults, surely that's all that matters. Why would God care who I sleep with? And indeed, I think we've probably underestimated how widespread a 1 Corinthians 6 verse 13 view is now in our world.

[14 : 35] Let me show you another way this sort of thinking is all around us. Think about what the most common slogans of our world now are.

Be true to yourself. You do you. Follow your heart. Now, what do all these slogans have in common? All these slogans rest on one presupposition.

That how we feel inside defines who we really are. How we feel inside defines who we really are.

So, if I feel a certain way, that must be who I am, regardless of my body. So, even if my body has a certain anatomy, if how I feel doesn't match that, then it's my inner feelings that matter.

My body is incidental to the true. Me, it has no bearing on my authentic self. At best, my body is just a blank canvas upon which I can paint my identity.

[15 : 44] It certainly isn't more than that. And that's why our world has become so confused in the areas of sex and gender. It has taken a 1 Corinthians 6 verse 13 view, separating our bodies from our identities.

Now, ironically, given how our culture sometimes obsesses about our bodies in terms of what we eat and how we exercise, it actually has a very low view of the body.

But Christian, Paul says, you are different. You have a high view of the body. Why?

Because you believe the gospel. And so that means you believe that Jesus came into this world in the flesh. You know, places like 1 Timothy 3 verse 16 and 1 John 4 verse 2 to 3 make clear that that's part and parcel of the gospel.

But that means also that you believe Jesus was raised from the dead in the flesh. He didn't just emerge from the tomb as a ghost.

[16 : 58] He came back to life physically and bodily. And if you believe that, Paul says, that means you believe verse 14.

By his power, God raised the Lord from the dead and he will raise us also. In other words, you believe that one day you will be raised in the same way Jesus was raised.

Your body will be raised. As 1 Corinthians 15 later puts it, Jesus is the first fruit and in him all will be made alive.

And so what that means is that God has big plans for your body. That's the logic of the gospel. Just look at verse 13 again. The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

Your body matters. It has a purpose. It's not just there to satisfy your sexual urges. It's not just there to be discarded once God saves your soul.

[18 : 08] After all, God saves you as body and soul. Not soul without body. Your body is meant for resurrection, not destruction.

It's meant for the Lord, conforming to his purposes. And if our bodies matter to God, that means what we do with our bodies matter now.

Now here's a helpful illustration I've learned. Think of your house. If your house is facing demolition, you won't care too much what happens to it. You know, you let your kids paint graffiti on it.

You won't bother to repair the leaking roof. You won't be investing in it to upgrade its structures. But what if your house is being renovated instead? Ah, now you'll treat it differently, won't you?

You'll be repainting the walls, refitting it for future use, and so on. And Paul says, in Christ, our bodies are houses facing renovation, not demolition.

[19 : 20] And if that's true, then we won't treat our bodies simply as a sexual plaything. We'll use it in a way that is God-honoring. And so that's the logic of the gospel.

But Paul now shows a second way in which the logic of the gospel impacts the way we see our bodies. So here's the second thing we need to know. Secondly, your body is united with Christ. Your body is united with Christ. Have a look at verse 15. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

Now it's easy to read that and think that Paul means that we become members of Christ's body the same way that we become members of a library. You know, we can always sign up today and we draw our membership next week.

But the Greek word translated members here actually refer to our body parts. And so one Bible translation says that we are the limbs and organs of Christ.

[20 : 29] And that's a good way to capture what Paul is really getting at. You know, how incredible is that? Paul is trying to find an image to show just how closely joined up our bodies are to Christ.

And that's what he comes up with. We are his limbs. We are his organs. And what a privilege that is, Paul says. But if that is our privilege, then, verse 15 again, shall I then take the members, the body parts of Christ, and unite them with a prostitute?

Here's the question Paul is asking. What are you giving your bodies over to? For in one sense, what you unite your body with, you unite Jesus with.

If you're uniting with a prostitute, you're uniting Jesus with a prostitute. Or to extend the example, if your eyes are looking at pornographic activity on the screen, Jesus' eyes are watching porn with you.

Now, that's a shocking image, I know. But then, Paul means to shock us. Why say no? This is why.

[21 : 53] God has saved us to be spiritually united with Christ, and sexually immoral behaviour is damaging to that union.

Now, why is that the case? To answer that question, we need to first answer the question of what sex is, and what it's for. Let me share with you a brilliant observation that I once heard.

Sometimes, the world thinks that its fundamental disagreement with Christians is over when to have sex. So they say, oh, Christians say that sex is for marriage, but for many of us, we say that, you know, you don't have to wait.

And because the world defines sex as simply a recreational activity for pleasure, or maybe even for love, they think that Christians and God are simply being anti-pleasure.

And so they reject his design. But in reality, the disagreement isn't over when to have sex. The disagreement is over what sex is.

[23 : 03] That's where the real difference lies. Now, the Bible does actually agree that sex can be for pleasure and love. Just read the book of Song of Songs in the Old Testament to see that.

In fact, sex is God's good idea in the first place. He created it. But the Bible says sex isn't just about creating a moment of ecstasy, which is basically what the world thinks.

Rather, sex is about joining two human beings together at the deepest possible level. And that's why sex and marriage must go together.

That's why Paul says what he says at the end of verse 16. For it is said, the two will become one flesh.

Marriage, Paul says, is a one flesh union. That's what it fundamentally is. You see, marriage is not just an emotional bond that you'll feel with someone.

[24 : 12] We all share emotional bonds with different people. Maybe our parents or our best friend. Maybe a respected mentor. But marriage isn't just another emotional bond that happens to be more intense.

No, it falls into a different category altogether. It's a unique kind of union. It's the bringing together of a man and a woman in a way that is exclusive and permanent.

And you share that union with only one person. Your spouse. And sex is that unifying act that helps create that one flesh union.

sex is so powerful that it is the only act in the entire world that can unite two human beings together and at the same time bring a new life into being.

Think about that. That's how powerful sex is. It joins two lives together and has the potential to bring another life into being. And so no wonder God says sex shouldn't just happen with whenever we like, with whoever we like, whether in person or vicariously through a screen.

[25 : 38] And no wonder Paul says verse 16 through the Corinthians. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

Why say no to sexual activity outside marriage? Because sex is like fire. In its proper place, fire can be life-giving, something warm and even amazing.

But outside its proper place, it can do serious harm to you. And God doesn't want you to play with fire. And even more significantly, God says it matters because ultimately, the sexual union found in marriage itself is a picture of our union with Christ.

Now that might sound surprising and even uncomfortable to you, but the scriptures don't share your discomfort. The scriptures are not afraid to employ this kind of imagery from time to time.

Now let me unpack that for you a little. You see, when we get married, we are making promises to each other. We say to your spouse, I belong to you and you belong to me.

[26 : 58] We forsake all others and then we have sex as a physical seal of that commitment. And the Bible says, well, marriage is designed in that way because it's a signpost to the gospel.

For what is the gospel? It's our Lord Jesus making promises to us. It's him saying that he will never leave us nor abandon us.

He will take us as his treasured possession. And in turn, we say to him, we forsake all other gods. We belong to you. And we even take on his family name.

And then, the Bible says we're united with him. we enter into union with him. One that will be fully experienced in the new creation. As Paul says, verse 17, whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

And so, that's why in the Bible over and over again, the picture of a marriage relationship is used to describe the relationship between God and his people.

[28 : 10] God is pictured as a bridegroom in places like Isaiah 54, verse 5 and 62, verse 5. Jesus calls himself a bridegroom in Mark 2, verse 19.

And Ephesians 5 pictures the relationship between Christ and his church as a marriage relationship. Because marriage and everything contained within the marriage relationship, including sex, acts as a signpost to the gospel.

And so, that's why sex is so significant. And why sexual immorality is such a serious thing. You know what has sex and the gospel to do with each other? actually, everything. But here's the other thing to remember. Because sex is a signpost, that means that although it's significant, it's not the most significant thing of all.

Signs never ultimately point to themselves. They point to the thing that you're looking for. And so, sex doesn't point to itself either as the ultimate thing.

[29 : 27] No, they point to the truly significant thing, which is our ultimate union with Christ in the new creation. And so, as I've been speaking, I'm aware that there are many singles who are listening in.

And you might feel left out. If sex is for marriage, and I'm single, then am I missing out? And that's when we could be tempted to go looking for sexual pleasure in some form.

But, if you know that sex is just a signpost to a future reality, where God will be in perfect relationship with his people, that it's a reality that you one day will share in because you believe in Jesus, you can say no now.

Because you know that what that longing is pointing to will one day be fulfilled. You see, there are two ways that you could look at any sexual longings or desires that you are experiencing today. You could look at them and think, man, God is so terrible. Why is he making me suffer by making me so frustrated? Or you could look at them and think, wow, you know, these desires that I'm experiencing, even though I can't fulfill them now in obedience to God?

[30 : 54] Well, I can still be thankful because these desires are a signpost, a pointer to the depth of his love for me. And one day I will experience what that signpost is pointing to.

I will experience the depth of his overwhelming love in the new creation. So I can wait. I know that I've got something better to look forward to.

Now, some of you, as you've been listening to this sermon, you have another reaction. You have maybe felt more and more condemned. You don't need anyone to tell you that you're a sexual sinner.

You're ashamed of what you've done. You're ashamed of what you've gotten up to. You're ashamed of what you look at. But here's what you need to know. Thirdly, your bodies have been bought and refashioned.

You need to hear verse 20. You were bought at a price. And you didn't contribute a single penny to the price that was paid for you.

[32 : 06] God freely absorbed the entire cost. Jesus bought your body knowing that it was a body that had done shameful things in the past.

He saw what your eyes and your ears and your mouth and even your genitals might have done. And he didn't say, yuck, not worth it.

No, he said, let me close the deal. And he stretched out his hands, had his body whipped and disfigured and nailed to a cross so that he could be your redeemer.

And as a result, hear these words again from verse 11. you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.

And God has now refashioned your bodies. Remember, it's meant for resurrection. And God says, because I've bought you, you are no longer your own.

[33 : 22] Even your bodies don't belong to you. That's what happens when you become a Christian. And rather, God says, I'm using your bodies now as portable temples, temples of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 19. I've handed the Holy Spirit the keys and he's already moved in. He's ready to make himself at home. Why not make him feel welcome?

And the way you make him feel welcome is to flee sexual immorality. Verse 18. So when you see something that makes him uncomfortable, you take flight.

You seek safety. And you find safety when you run to the cross which lets you enter the throne room of grace. We often think that we can only enter God's throne room based on our record.

And so we shrink back. Or we think that, oh, God sees us coming from afar, and then he'll sigh and say, oh no, here comes that sexual sinner again. But because you're washed clean by the cross, because you're in Christ, that is not true.

[34 : 36] God delights to see you coming. You see, you used to chase after sin. God already knows that. But now sin chases after you.

God knows that too. And so as it chases you, God says, run to me. You know, fleeing from sexual immorality doesn't mean fleeing from Jesus.

And yet, that's what we often do, isn't it? We sin sexually, and then we flee, not so much from sexual immorality, but from Jesus. We don't dare go near to him. But next time you read verse 18, read it this way.

Flee to Jesus. That's what fleeing from sexual immorality means. Why say no?

Because you are saying yes to Jesus. And that's why verse 20, we honour God with our bodies.

Because you've already said yes to Jesus.

[35 : 44] well, I've been privileged, I think, over the last few years to watch my friends, some of my friends keep saying yes to Jesus as they battle with a variety of sexual temptations.

You know, some of them face stuff that I can't imagine, but they walk faithfully with God, they humble me, they are an example to me, because they are teaching me that Jesus is worth it.

They're putting that in action. And this morning, I know it's been a bit of a dense sermon, and I do admit that I am slightly frustrated with myself because I wish I'm a bit clearer in my communication today than maybe I have been.

Maybe it's a good idea to listen to this talk again once it's up on the website. And I should also say that, as we hear about later on in the announcements, that there are other things you could say about marriage and singleness and sex that we couldn't deal with here, but which maybe Paul will touch on in the following weeks in 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

And so if you're thinking, oh, what about this or what about that, well, it's possible that Paul will cover it in chapter 7, so I just ask for your patience in that case. But my brothers and sisters, I hope today we can see that there is far more to sex than just say no.

[37 : 14] I hope when we are wondering why say no, we now begin to see a better answer. When asked why say no, I hope we won't answer, I don't know.

But we will answer instead, because I know the gospel, because I know Jesus. My friends, even our bodies matter, the Jesus.

And because he loved us first, he bought our bodies when they were still covered with shame, and he has come as the bridegroom, so we now love him back as the bride, knowing that our bodies are no longer our own, but are united to him.

And so as the bride, let's honor him with our bodies. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, as we come today, we want to humble ourselves before you again, knowing that sometimes your word can be quite direct, or quite goes into areas that we prefer that you don't go into.

But Father, we pray, Lord, that we will be willing to let our whole lives, whatever area of our lives, come under the spotlight of your word. And we pray, Lord, that as you shine light into these kind of areas, we pray, Lord, that we would indeed turn to you.

[39 : 01] Thank you, Lord, that we can flee to the Lord Jesus, that when we come to him in repentance and in faith, he welcomes us with open arms. And so, Father, help us to remember that.

Help us to flee constantly to the throne of grace. Help us to flee from sexual immorality. Help us to make use and honour you with our bodies.

Father, I just pray for all of us, Lord, this morning who are listening. I'm sure there are many who are battling some form of sexual temptation, battling to click on that website, watch that video, do something with your boyfriend or girlfriend, whatever it is, Lord.

I just pray, Lord, that you would reorient their vision, help them see the bigger picture, help them to see how in your design you have created sex, what it's for, and to want to live in line with your design.

So we just comment all this, Lord, into your hands. peace. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.