

The Corinthians had overreached in their distinguishing as Christians between the body and the spirit. In some respects, the believer's body is exempt in this life from Christ's redemptive work and the new creation He has inaugurated; in another sense, it is very much a partaker in the new creation and must be consecrated to the Lord even as the spirit is. This dynamic is fleshed out in terms of the truth of *resurrection* – not only as a future hope, but, more importantly to Paul's argument, as a present reality (6:14-20).

Paul noted the correspondence between the stomach and food and the fact that both pertain to the present age alone; they are not of the new creation, and thus God has appointed them to pass away. He drew a similar, but contrasting correspondence between the body and Christ Himself: The stomach and food find their specific purpose and meaning in relation to each other, and in similar fashion so do the believer's body and Christ. But whereas the former relationship pertains only to this life, the latter is ultimate and everlasting. The indivisible relationship between the believer's body and the Lord is a key feature of eschatological fulfillment – i.e., of the *eschaton*, and the very fact that the eschaton has been inaugurated in Christ means that the Lord/body relationship is a *present* reality and not merely a future one. (God's everlasting kingdom is fully realized in its substance, though not yet in its consummate form.)

- The present aspect of the believer's participation in Christ's resurrection (and in particular, the present relationship between the Lord and the believer's physical body) is Paul's main consideration in this passage, but he laid the foundation for that treatment by noting the ultimate outcome God has appointed for the Christian's body (6:14). Jesus' resurrection is the glorification of His own body, but it is equally the guarantee of the same glorification for His people; the divine power that raised Him in an incorruptible body will do the same for them (cf. 15:1ff with Philippians 3:17-21).

This promise of future resurrection is sufficient to disallow the notion that the Christian's life in Christ doesn't in any way implicate what he does in and with his body. It's true that the present body is of this world and perishes at death, but this isn't the end of the story. The believer's body is appointed to share in Christ's life and consummate humanity as truly and thoroughly as is his spirit.

- The Christian's body is destined for future glory, but even now it possesses the first-fruits of that glory in the earnest of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14); as the Church is Christ's body and believers are individually members of it (12:27), so their physical bodies are members of Him by His indwelling presence in His Spirit (6:15, 19; cf. John 14:16-20; Romans 8:9-10; Colossians 1:25-27).

Though presently subjected to corruption and decay and destined for death, the believer's body is nonetheless "*for the Lord*" even as is his spirit. The reason is that "*the Lord is for the body*": Jesus' resurrection life is the destiny of the whole creation (Ephesians 1:9-10; Romans 8:18-23); how much more the human body which He Himself assumed in His incarnation and sanctified and glorified forever (cf. 15:35-49; Hebrews 2:5-18)? Jesus has taken in Himself Adam's nature and form in order to take to Himself Adam's children – not merely in a loving relationship, *but in the exhaustive intimacy portrayed in the one-flesh union of husband and wife.*

4. Yahweh spoke of His relationship with His covenant people as that of a husband to a wife (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-32 with Isaiah 50-54; Hosea 1-2; etc.), and Paul recognized that that covenant union has found its destiny in Jesus Christ and His Church as the fulfilled “Israel.” Paul thought biblically, and this meant thinking of Christ’s relationship with His saints in terms of the union of a husband and wife (ref. 2 Corinthians 11:1-2; Ephesians 5:25-32; cf. also John 3:22-29; Revelation 19:6-8, 21:1-12, 22:16-17). That imagery was in his mind as he penned his instruction to the Corinthians, and is evident in this passage in his subtle allusions to marriage and the sanctity of the marital union.
- The husband-wife relationship best expresses the divine-human relationship precisely because the union of a man and a woman embodies the deepest and most thorough form of intimacy known to human beings. No natural relation can capture the intimate spiritual union between God and His people, but the marital union comes closest and is therefore the most effective way for God to speak of it.
 - Yahweh employed the marital metaphor with Israel, not because He and the covenant nation actually enjoyed the intimate relationship the metaphor signifies, but because of Israel’s prophetic and typological role. What God chose Israel to be it would become in Jesus Christ, the True Israel, and Israel would itself obtain this blessed status together with the Gentiles as the fulfilled “Israel of God.”

The husband-wife intimacy revealed (but not realized) in Yahweh’s relationship with Israel has now become an everlasting reality in the being-to-being union of the triune God with the human race in and through Jesus Christ. What God was to Israel in prefiguration and promise, He has become in reality to His Church; He has realized the intimacy of His ordained union and communion with His image-sons, and therefore they know Him and He communes with them as He is – as Father, Son and Spirit.

- Even in its most perfect expression, the intimacy of husband and wife falls far short of the divine-human union. The marital union is material and natural; its intimacy is confined to the limits of a “one-flesh” union. Conversely, God and His people share a “*one-spirit*” union: They have become one with Him in Jesus Christ by the Spirit who is the Spirit both of the Father and of the Son (6:16-17).

The Corinthians’ *one-spirit* union with Christ is the basis for Paul’s stinging reminder to them that their *bodies* are “members of Christ” on the one hand and the “temple of the Holy Spirit” on the other (“*Do you not know...*”; vv. 6:15, 19). The former is true because the latter is true, and both realities stripped them of their foolish notions about the exemption of their bodies from their lives in Christ.

- The union between believers and Christ is spiritual and not physical; it is a “one-spirit” union that the husband-wife “one-flesh” union only symbolizes. But this doesn’t mean it has no relation to or import for the Christian’s body. Quite the contrary, precisely because they are one spirit with Christ and their union with Him in the Spirit pertains to and encompasses the *whole person*, believers’ bodies are just as much joined to the Lord and sanctified to Him as are their spirits.

5. The above considerations of the spiritual import of marital imagery are important because they are fundamental assumptions behind Paul's argument in this passage. His concern wasn't with the husband-wife relationship as such, but with what it signifies in the spiritual realm and how it finds its ultimacy and true meaning in the divine-human relationship centered in the person of Jesus Christ. In particular, Paul was subtly pressing the Corinthians toward the recognition that, if the "one-flesh" dynamic of the husband-wife relationship has grave implications for human sexuality and how it is to be expressed – which indeed it does (cf. Matthew 19:1-9; Hebrews 13:4), how much more is that the case by virtue of the "one-spirit" union which exists between the Christian and the Lord who is his spiritual Husband.
- a. It was obvious to Paul that the Corinthians had failed to grasp this, and he was determined to put an end to their foolishness by confronting them, not merely with the fact of their sexual immorality, but with the implications of it. His thesis was this: If believers' bodies are members of Christ – by virtue of His present indwelling in the Spirit as well as their future share in His bodily glory, *then He is implicated in everything they do in their bodies*. When they join themselves sexually to another person who isn't their spouse, they bring Him into that union. It's not just that Jesus is brought into an unholy act; He is effectively joined to that other person: Christ's members are made the members of a "harlot" (6:15).

Though Paul was non-specific in his charges, there is no doubt that he was addressing a literal problem of sexual immorality at Corinth. That such behavior would be present in a community of Christians strikes the modern reader as outrageous, especially since the context indicates that the Corinthians were not particularly disturbed by it. But viewed within its historical and social context, this sexual activity and the church's response become more understandable.

Sexual involvement beyond the marriage bed was an accepted part of Greco-Roman society and culture. The people of first-century Corinth would have scratched their heads in mocking disbelief at the American phenomenon of men sneaking off in shame to engage prostitutes in secret encounters, often under the cover of night. In their world, it was *expected*, not merely socially acceptable, that men would have sexual relations with women other than their wives, whether as part of religious rituals or mere recreation.

Hays' comments are helpful:

"The social world of the ancient Corinthians differed greatly from ours. Prostitution was not only legal, it was a widely accepted social convention. 'The sexual latitude allowed to men by Greek public opinion was virtually unrestricted. Sexual relations of males with both boys and harlots were generally tolerated' (Talbert, 32). Thus, the Corinthian men who frequented prostitutes were not asserting some unheard-of new freedom; they were merely insisting on their right to continue participating in a pleasurable activity that was entirely normal within their own culture."

This perspective brings the sexual immorality among the Corinthian believers into a new light. It didn't reflect high-handed rebellion against their faith and their Lord; extra-marital sexuality was part of everyday life, and these Corinthian offenders – and their wives and Christian brethren – likely didn't give their actions a second thought. *This dynamic highlights the profound effect culture and historical context have on both Christian theology and Christian practice.*

- People are confined to and immersed in their own time and culture, with the result that they're largely blind to the myriad factors influencing their perception and judgment; they are like the fish that doesn't know it's wet.
- A person's historical, cultural, and even religious contexts have immense effect in forming his worldview and the lens through which he perceives and interprets all things – things inside him as well as outside him. There is no neutrality or absolute objectivity in human existence; every person's perspective, thought and convictions are framed by contextual considerations. This pertains to a person's theology as much as to his practice, as Church history makes abundantly clear.

Paul wasn't confronting overt rebels, but believers who yet needed to take their thoughts and notions captive to Christ. *They were yet thinking with natural minds* – minds insensitive to the cultural and personal presuppositions behind their convictions and conduct; minds still operating according to the natural human principle that personal conviction is identical with objective truth.

- b. It seems obvious that the immorality Paul was addressing involved prostitution, but it would be a mistake to limit his charge of "harlotry" to that particular practice. In the first place, there was a whole range of accepted sexual practices in Corinthian culture, including those associated with religious rituals. Whether or not any of the believers at Corinth were engaging in such rituals is unclear, but Paul wouldn't have wanted his readers to confine his instruction to any particular form of sexual immorality. He was articulating an all-encompassing perspective from which Christians are to view and employ their bodies, and he expected the Corinthians to apply his instruction in that way.

Paul's principled approach along with contextual considerations points toward a broader use of the word *harlot* than simply in reference to a prostitute. In the first place, Paul was addressing the matter of immorality in the broad sense of any and all improper sexual engagement (ref. 6:13, 18-19). Secondly, this Greek noun itself has various physical (sexual) connotations as well as a crucial spiritual one. *In fact, the Scripture most often employs the notion of harlotry with respect to unfaithfulness to God.* If Yahweh was a husband to His covenant people, then their unfaithfulness to Him (in whatever form) amounted to harlotry (cf. Judges 2:17; Psalm 106:34-39; Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 2:14-24; esp. Ezekiel 16 and 23). And if Israel's turning away from Yahweh constituted harlotry, how much more is that the case with Christians who are truly joined to Christ as their Husband?

Paul knew the Scriptures and was well familiar with its use of marital imagery in relation to the covenant. Most importantly, he recognized that covenant union as a marital relationship has been realized in truth in the union of Jesus Christ and His Church. For this reason it's quite likely that Paul intended a double entendre by his use of the term *harlot*. He was doubtless addressing the problem of Christians engaging in extra-marital sexual activity, but he was concerned to put that activity into its proper context: The Corinthians needed to understand that their great offense wasn't lying with harlots; it was committing adultery against their true Husband. *Even more, because they were members of Him, their adultery went beyond an affair behind His back; they were guilty of joining Him to their lover.*

- c. One further thing to consider is Paul's assertion that sexual immorality is the only offense which a Christian commits "against his own body" (v. 17). The obvious problem with this is that it's not true in the strictest sense. There are lots of sins that directly assault and violate the body, including intoxication, gluttony and other eating disorders, self-mutilation and suicide. Commentators have ranged in their explanations from treating this as a careless overstatement on Paul's part to an intentional use of rhetorical flourish in order to make his point (i.e., that no other sin implicates and violates the body to the extent sexual immorality does).

But treated in context together with the preceding observations, it appears Paul was singling out sexual sin because of the implications it carries for the believer in the spiritual realm (verse 19 clarifies verse 18). The Christian who sins sexually sins uniquely against his own body, not because sexual acts involve the body – that applies to many actions and activities, *but because the Christian's body belongs to the Lord, the Husband* (ref. 7:3-4). Clearly the believer's body belongs to the Lord no less with respect to every bodily sin, but the marital connotations of the "one-spirit" union between Christ and His own by His indwelling Spirit give to sexual transgression a unique dimension of violation and offense.

6. In closing out his summary Paul made a pointed shift from marital to *redemptive* imagery. The believer's body – and ultimately the corporate body (the Church) as God's "spiritual house" – is the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, but the basis for this holy inhabitation is Christ's work of redemption that began with the incarnation and reached its climax at Calvary. The Christian is to glorify God *in* (not just *with*) his body because he is not his own; he was bought with a price. All that he is and has belongs to the Lord.

Redemption highlights ownership, and this fact alone is sufficient to establish the believer's obligation to submission and obedience. But by itself this dimension of Christian truth is inadequate to fully state the case, as Paul makes clear in this context and throughout his writings. Christians have been redeemed, but not to become mere servants. For servants have no enduring place in the Father's house; it is sons who remain in it forever (John 8:31-36). Christians are sons of the Father, and so brethren of the Son. But, viewed as a body, Jesus' Church is His Bride. He gave Himself to purchase a people, but a people conceived as the object of His devoted love (Ephesians 5:25-27). It is from that vantage point that the saints are to consecrate themselves to Him, body and spirit.