

GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY

By Steve Zeisler

Give or take a few months, it was "twenty years ago today, Sergeant Pepper taught the band to play." Some in the media have used the twentieth anniversary of the release of the Beatles record album, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, as a milestone to measure social change. The summer of 1967 was labeled the "summer of love" in San Francisco. Listening to taped interviews of the leaders of thought of that era has been a fascinating experience for me. I was a freshman in college, living away from home for the first time, in 1967. I remember touring the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco that year and being amazed at the proclamation that a new age was dawning, the "age of Aquarius." The old rules that governed society were to be done away with, we were told, and would be replaced by new insights into human sexuality and experience. Today, of course, all of that thinking seems ridiculous. It is put down to youthful exuberance, and marked as patently immature.

Yet we hear voices on all sides today announcing the discovery of a new understanding of human sexuality and freedom. It's probably safe to say that twenty years from now the wisdom of our contemporary social scientists and other leaders of thought will also be considered immature and lacking in depth. C.S. Lewis called this syndrome "chronological snobbery." He meant by that that whatever philosophy is most current always seems to be obvious, clear and factual, so that all that has gone before must be thrown out. Contemporary lines of thought and philosophy seem always to be considered superior to past offerings. This certainly is true in the area of sexual ethics and mores.

The Bible is considered by many to be backward and uptight in the matter of human sexuality. The Scriptural teaching, particularly the words of the apostle Paul on this matter, is held to be old-fashioned, without sophistication, and uninformed. We have advanced far beyond that way of thinking, we are told. We have nothing to learn from Scripture because its view is antiquated and therefore out of date. Such thinking is restrictive, inhibited and filled with irrational fears, we hear. But the truth of the matter is that the Scriptures are neither backward nor uptight in their teaching on human sexuality.

The passage before us in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians today has as much to say about the beauty of sexual morality as it does about the pitfalls of sexual immorality. We have arrived at a theological centerpoint for understanding human sexuality. The truth we will study is extremely important, realistic, enlightened--and up to date. Unlike the trite and passing thinking of the "flower-children" era, the wisdom of this passage of Scripture is profound and always contemporary.

We begin our study in verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 6:

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.

Two phrases in this passage apparently are quotes which the apostle makes from a letter he received from the Corinthians themselves. The phrases in question are, "All things are lawful for me," and, "Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food." The Corinthians apparently used these proverbs as a way of determining what was wise and acceptable behavior.

Now Paul recognizes, first, that both of these sayings have a kernel of truth. He does not deny them outright,

but rather expands upon them and brings them into balance. While there a ring of truth in what the Corinthians were saying, there was an immaturity about their interpretation. Like the youth of the '60's, or the '80's, they were making the mistake of thinking they knew more than they actually did. Thus the apostle will endeavor to correct their thinking in what he says. Here again, as in chapter 4, the apostle adopts the role of a father who is bent on correcting the thinking of immature and somewhat arrogant teenagers. While their opinions and views on sexuality had some basis in fact, their views were out of balance due to their lack of wisdom. The apostle's task will be to provide that balance.

Let us first look at the phrase, "All things are lawful for me." We must concede that the Corinthians may very well have been using some of Paul's own words when they quoted this. After all, the apostle had often declared that Christians were no longer "under the law." Christians were not beholden to a written code that commanded obedience. But, having said that, there was more to the avoidance of legalism than the bald statement, "All things are lawful for me."

The Corinthians were operating under the assumption that if they could remove themselves from all the rules, sanctions and legal codes, they could be masters of their own lives. Back of Paul's thinking was the awareness that every human being was meant to serve somebody or something. Bob Dylan was declaring truth when he wrote the song, *You've Gotta Serve Somebody*. That is your fate, no matter who you are. One who has been freed from the written code is required to choose another Master, Jesus Christ, and live according to the power which he provides. On the other hand, one who has been freed from the law and who yet refused to submit to the yoke of Christ was doomed to serve his passions. He, unfortunately, would find himself being swept away by other forces.

So while it was true that the Corinthians had been freed from the law --all things were lawful for them, in other words--there was a balance to be maintained: "but not all things are profitable," says Paul. Everything we may be free to do as a result of being freed from the law might not be profitable. Many people discovered the truth of this in the recent stock market crash. There were hidden costs to be reckoned with which were not readily apparent in the promise of profit to come. There was a bottom line all the while. While Christians are freed from the law, it would be foolish to imagine that every choice open to them as a result is either profitable or beneficial.

It's hard to make this point without immediately thinking of this generation's scourge regarding human sexuality, the disease AIDS. Some who have refused to serve Christ with their bodies, and have instead chosen to serve their passions, have discovered to their horror that there were hidden costs involved which they had not reckoned on. They are now faced either with repression and fear, or disease, or both. AIDS is one of the terrible costs that many did not take into account when they began to give vent to their passions. These people are dread testimony to the fact that the choices we make in regard to our sexuality life are critical in the extreme.

Much has been said concerning the question of whether or not AIDS is a punishment from God for sin. Romans 1 uses the phrase "God gave them over" three times with reference to his rejection of mankind's rebellion. God gave people over--he took his hand off them--is what that means; he stopped protecting them. I think it is in that sense, not in the specific sense of God fingering individual sinners with deadly punishment, that we should consider the connection between sin and AIDS. There the Bible is not talking about thunderbolts, about God deliberately deciding to punish people. What it is declaring, rather, is that God has taken his protective hand away from people and allowed the results that come from the natural flow of events in creation.

God did not make human bodies for the purpose of sexual promiscuity. If we insist on rebelling against that plan, there are consequences to our choices. At times, a parent may choose a specific type of punishment for a child's act of disobedience. The child may be grounded, or have his freedoms restricted in some way. At other times, however, a parent may choose to punish his child by allowing him to have his own way, and have him suffer the consequences of his choice. The parent may choose to allow the child to skip his homework, with the result that his grades suffer, to teach him that there are natural consequences to his choices to play rather than do his homework. The same principle applies if a child wants to play in the school band: he must practice on the instrument of his choice, otherwise he will not be picked to play in the band. An athlete must practice

his sport or else suffer the consequences of a bad performance on the field.

God as Creator knows that viruses mutate and that diseases will eventually make their way into the population. In his word he has warned repeatedly that we were not created for promiscuity. Eventually he allows creation to have its way and the consequences descend upon mankind. Certain sexual choices have hidden costs, is what the apostle is saying here.

Along this line, I have read reviews of the new movie, *Fatal Attraction*, which apparently is causing a stir these days. The film has evidently provided wide discussion and analysis. It tells the story of a happily married man who spends a weekend in an adulterous relationship, with the intention of resuming his marriage again the next week. But it turns out that the woman he was involved with goes mad and acts violently towards him and his family. Here we see that a popular movie bears out the truth that a sexual choice may prove extremely costly in the end; that while it may seem of no consequence at first, the hidden costs will eventually result in scarring and denial of intimacy with one's partner in the future. This is why the apostle attempts to balance the thinking behind the proverb quoted by the Corinthians.

The proverb, "All things are lawful for me," is balanced by a second warning: "I will not be mastered by anything." Having left behind the written code, if the Corinthians did not choose to be mastered by Christ, they were setting themselves up to be mastered by something else. Paul would have none of that. A recent newspaper account of a boy who had molested his sister revealed that he had been mastered by pornographic phone calls which he had been making to a number dedicated to this type of thing. The boy did not know what he was getting into until he had become dominated by what he was choosing to do. I once was asked to come to the office of a highly thought of businessman to help him follow through on a decision to remove sacks full of pornographic materials from his work place. The vastness of the pile indicated that he had been completely mastered by pornography. I have no doubt that he did not think it would end this way when he decided to buy that first magazine.

Legalism is a blight on Christianity. But its opposite--lawlessness--is no less a blight. Paul determined to not be mastered by either a dead code or by his passions. His only Master was the loving God who had created him. A leaving behind of the law without a submitting to the lordship of Christ places us in grave danger. Dorothy Sayers' creation, *Lord Peter Wimsey*, is one of my favorite fictional detectives. His manservant Bunter can turn his hand to anything--cooking, photography, car repairs--it doesn't seem to matter. But he never aspires to anything other than being a gentleman's gentleman. This is because he is in a right relationship with his boss, Lord Peter. Thus he is free to be an effective servant in almost any field, simply because he knows who he is and what his role is. It struck me that Christians who are similarly in a right relationship with their Master are the ones who become most effective in their Christian walk. "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."

"Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food." This second proverb of the Corinthians seems to say that it does not matter what we do with our bodies because they are merely physical entities. If you're hungry, then eat; if you're thirsty, drink; if you feel like having sex, do so. These normal appetites of the body have little consequence, this proverb maintains--and besides, it's nobody's business anyway. Indulging in them is not an affront to either God or man.

Paul agrees that there are certain things about our bodies that will perish with age and use. Eating food and gaining strength is a normal process, but both food and stomachs will be done away with. Other parts of the body undergo change also. Hair turns grey or falls out; certain parts of the body become flabby and weak. But the apostle goes on to say that we will always be physical, we will always have bodies, and that our sexuality touches the eternal. That is what verse 14 declares: "Now God not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power."

The notion that sex is merely another physical appetite to be indulged in whenever we like is very foolish indeed. Our sexuality is a part of us that will last forever. David Prior writes in his commentary, "There is all the difference in the world between food, which is digested by the stomach and passed out through the bowels, and sexual intercourse, which affects the whole person, and cannot be dismissed flippantly as a purely physiological phenomenon."

Our bodies were not given us for the purpose of immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. The immature proverbs of immature people who claim they can do anything they like may very well be true in part, but there are apt to be serious costs to these kinds of choices. If you are not mastered by Christ, something else will master you. There is no such thing as inconsequential sex, is what the apostle is saying.

In verses 15 through 20 we have another series of three "Do you not know?" questions which the apostle asks. (Earlier in this series we examined three similar questions.) The force of Paul's questions in this closing section of the chapter is to ask the Corinthians, "Can you possibly claim to be ignorant of what I am about to tell you?"

Verse 15:

Do you not know [Can you possibly claim to be unaware] that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or 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? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" is Paul's first question. It seems to me that the point which the apostle is making here is that as Christians we may not retain parts of ourselves to the exclusion of Christ. We do not have the option of taking a time-out in our Christian lives. There is no place we can go and leave behind our Christianity. Our bodies, says Paul, are "members of Christ" (verse 15); we are "one spirit with Him" (verse 17).

My younger son and I have a wrestling match on our bed occasionally. He gets to make the rules, and one of them is that he is the only one who can call time out. It's very convenient for him, because every time I am about to pin him, he cries, "Time out!" But Christians do not have that luxury. We have no weekends off, we have no secret places to which we can go and there exclude Christ. Everywhere we go, every conversation we have, everything we experience involves our Lord. "Do you not know that?" asks Paul of the Corinthians.

Secondly, Paul asks, "Do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot becomes one body with her? For He says, "The two will become one flesh." Sex with a prostitute appears to be the best attempt man has come up with in order to have anonymous, illicit sex. No names are exchanged; the occasion is usually brief; it is soon forgotten. If ever the term "casual sex" was worthy of use, it would be with regard to sex with a prostitute. There is no commitment, save a fee paid for services rendered.

Nevertheless, the apostle says that even that seemingly unimportant act has a profound effect: "the two become one flesh." There is no such thing therefore as casual sex. Our sexuality is constructed in such a profound and deep fashion that any act of sex is critical and important. I read that the military establishment is attempting to monitor so-called "safe" red light districts for our troops overseas. Governments, it seems, feel that sex with prostitutes is an appropriate form of recreation for military men. What a far cry from what the Scriptures declare! There is no such thing as illicit recreational sex. It always involves the whole person in an extremely significant act: "the two will become one flesh."

What should the Christian do in the face of the temptation to become involved in this kind of thing? "Flee immorality," counsels Paul. Run away from it. Don't try to manage it, just take off. "Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." Jesus said, "If your eye offends you, pluck it out." You must take drastic steps. Certain sins may be overcome. Prejudice, for instance. You can spend time with a group whom you once hated and learn that your prejudice against them is foolish. Eventually you will change. But the problem with sexual immorality is that it is a sin which is uniquely against

your own body.

Leon Morris writes, "Other sins against the body, for example, drunkenness or gluttony, involve the use of that which comes from without the body. The sexual appetite arises from within." We must be tough on ourselves in this area. Paul is not telling people to do something which is impossible. Some claim that the pressures to succumb to sexual temptation are so great that they have no recourse but to give in to them. But if we are in Christ that is not true. We do have the ability to say no to what are wrong sexual inclinations.

Finally, in his third "Do you not know?" question, Paul enters even deeper into the theology of this matter. "Do you not know," he asks, "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? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, therefore they are the seat of glory and honor to God. If you are a Christian, this is true of you wherever you go. God is worthy of your worship. You have been bought at a very high price: the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. He suffered the hell which we deserved, paying a price which is beyond reckoning for us, and he now has the right, having taken up residence in us, to be held in honor in his temple.

Those who suggest that contemporary liberationists, Dr. Ruth or any other expert, know more about human sexuality than do the Scriptures don't know what they are talking about. There is nothing backward, uptight, or irrationally fearful in what the apostle is saying in this chapter. Our sexuality is an extraordinary, delicate part of us in which God himself is involved. Thus our sexual choices involve us in profound and unending ways. "Therefore glorify God in your body," is the conclusion of the matter. At times, negative statements must be made. "Flee immorality" is one. But the positive alternative is, use your body in such a way that God is glorified.

What a possibility, that God himself could be glorified by our bodies! Furthermore, remembering the context here, Paul is saying that God is glorified when we resist temptation to involve ourselves in sexual immorality. But it is also true to say that God is glorified when we use our sexuality for the purposes he intended. Husbands and wives should rejoice in their sexuality. They should grow in it and experience it more fully. That too is glorifying to God. There is nothing of an anti-sexual bias in these verses. The warnings are against being controlled in ways that are ungodly. Proverbs 5 says, "Rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times. Be intoxicated always with her love." There is a sense in which denying what is wrong and agreeing to what is right in our sexual behavior is an extraordinary gift. Paul is not saying we should run from it, rather he is saying we should use our bodies to glorify God.

It seems perhaps ironic, perhaps not so ironic, that of all the people alive today who can look forward to a future in which there can be joy attached to their sexuality, it is precisely those people who have listened all along; those who have decided that monogamy or abstinence are the only options for them. We can be married to one mate, or else we can trust the Lord to keep our sexuality channeled solely for that purpose. People who have decided to act in this fashion do not need to fear sexually transmitted disease, and death.

And, as far as those who claim to be liberated are concerned, those who claim to know more about human sexuality than the Bible knows, increasingly their sex lives will be tainted with fear, restriction and uncertainty. They will find themselves living in a world filled with passions that may very well kill them. Those who have determined to glorify God in their bodies, however, are the ones who can look forward to their sexuality with joy, not fear.

Sex for Christians should never be considered casual. It is not something done in private, as if God were not present. It is always important. God is always present, and will be either honored or dishonored by our behavior. Sexual sin is demeaning and costly.

But whatever your past has been does not have to determine your future. If you are in Christ, as we have already seen, "you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified." A great price has been paid for you. "Therefore," says Paul, "glorify God in your body." Make the choice to glorify God. Then, because he loves us, in choosing to glorify him we will find ourselves given life, joy, and a sense of approval.

...you are not your own...you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

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Steve Zeisler
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