

# OUR BODIES BELONG TO GOD



## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:1–21; 1  
Corinthians 6:12–20

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Cor. 6:19)

Daily Bible Readings			
<b>M</b>	Aug. 4	Gen. 2:4–7, 18–25	God Creates Man and Woman
<b>T</b>	Aug. 5	Ps. 90:1–12	Life Is Short; Live Wisely
<b>W</b>	Aug. 6	1 Cor. 10:23–33	Live Gloriously
<b>Th</b>	Aug. 7	1 Tim. 4:1–5	Receive God's Gifts with Thanksgiving
<b>F</b>	Aug. 8	Ps. 139:1–12	No Hiding Place from God
<b>Sa</b>	Aug. 9	Ps. 139:13–24	Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

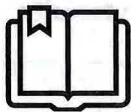
## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

In both readings for today, Romans 12:1–21 and 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, Paul shows great concern that the early Christians not use their bodies irresponsibly. These are not the only times Paul displays this concern (see Gal. 5:19–21, Eph. 4:17–24, and Col. 3:5–11). I remember reading Paul's warnings about bodily immorality as a young person and wondering why he was so eager to police people's behavior. Were those early Christians really that bad? While a definitive answer to this question probably lies outside our purview, it is possible to come up with at least one plausible explanation for Paul's anxiety. Paul and the churches to which he wrote were just beginning to bear the brunt of Roman suspicion and hostility. Think about it: in Jesus they were worshiping a person whom, not many years earlier, the Romans had executed as a political criminal. As we know from the next two or three centuries of early Christian history, the Roman government and Roman society in general often considered Christians as weird at best, dangerous at worst. When Paul exhorted Christians in Rome, Corinth, and elsewhere to live exemplary lives, not succumbing to the weaknesses of bodily

existence, he wanted them to keep their noses clean so the Romans wouldn't have further reason to want to make them go away.

The flip side of this is that Paul wanted the early churches to show their Roman neighbors that new life in Christ was something they should want to consider. We know from later records that early Christianity gained notoriety for promoting stability and community in a Roman world that needed both of these things. Christians were known for taking care of their sick and elderly members, and for trying to prevent the social inequality that characterized Roman society from insinuating itself into the church. Paul knew that measures such as these would draw people to the church.

*Holy God, help our lives to be a witness to those in our families and communities who need to know your loving grace. Amen.*



## SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

**6:12** “All things are permitted for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “All things are permitted for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. <sup>13</sup>“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup>And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. <sup>15</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup>Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” <sup>17</sup>But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. <sup>18</sup>Shun sexual immorality! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against the body itself. <sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup>For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

*Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.*

## HONORING CHRIST WITH OUR BEHAVIOR

**P**aul's concern in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 6 is that Christians' behavior, especially as it relates to physical gratifi-



cation, should bring honor to Christ. The two passages make this point in complementary ways.

When writing the church at Corinth, whose pattern for missing the point we saw in the lesson, Paul seems to engage them in a debate on the meaning of Christian freedom. Apparently, members of the Corinthian church had claimed that, if our spirits have been set free from the restrictions of the Jewish law, then it didn't much matter what we did with our bodies. This was an idea guaranteed to rub Paul the wrong way, for a variety of reasons. First, because it exhibits a presumed split between the body and the soul/spirit and does not fit the holistic view of human nature one finds in the Old Testament. Second, because it mistakes Christian freedom with license to do whatever we desire. And finally, because it condones sexual behavior that destroys marriages and families. Paul responded by saying that what we do with our bodies is not inconsequential, as these Corinthians seemed to be saying. Quite the contrary: our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we should treat them as holy vessels dedicated to the service of God and others. For another example of Paul struggling with just this kind of laissez-faire attitude toward post-conversion morality, see Romans, chapter 6.

In another image invoking the idea of worship, Paul exhorts his readers in Romans 12 to offer their bodies as a "living sacrifice," so that, rather than being "conformed to this age" they would be "transformed by the renewing of the mind." He explains how Christians collectively form one body, meaning that the way we use our bodies affects not simply us, but all other Christians as well. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, Paul extends the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, insisting that though we each comprise different parts, we all belong to one body. If this is the case, then what each of us experiences and chooses makes a difference for the other parts of the body. If I allow my mind to be transformed by the Spirit of Christ, then it lifts up the whole body. If, as Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 6, I give my body over to selfish gratification, then the whole body is diminished.



**How does Paul's understanding of the church as the body of Christ work in a culture such as ours which is focused on individual (rather than group) behavior and character?**

## CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

**B**oth of this lesson's Scripture passages involve Christian freedom, a term one can imagine made Paul wince. Don't get me wrong; Paul is a great apostle of Christian freedom. He insisted that God's grace frees us from the self-defeating sense that we have to earn God's love. Yet Paul frequently combated misunderstandings and distortions of the idea of Christian freedom. In Rome and Corinth, he encountered Christians who thought that God's grace freed us, not only from our attempts to save ourselves, but from any sense of ethical obligation. Christian freedom meant the absence of all constraint on our behavior.

Paul knew that genuine freedom means not the ability to do anything we want but the power to be the kind of people God created us to be. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul discusses the problem of meat offered to idols. Some Corinthian Christians were showing off, making a big deal of the fact that they were free to eat meat that had first been involved in pagan sacrifice. Paul admits that the "gods" to whom this meat was offered were not gods at all, because there was no deity but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, some converts to Christianity from the pagan religions had a problem with this. The "old" gods still felt real; any form of participation (however tangential) in their former religion felt like an idolatrous betrayal of their new Christian commitment. When the Corinthian show-offs pressured their formerly pagan friends to eat today's cheeseburger, which was yesterday's offering to Aphrodite or Hermes, it caused the new converts to fear judgment by God for relapsing into paganism.

Paul strongly criticized the show-offs for their callousness toward another's conscience. He said that even though all things might be allowed, this doesn't make them helpful or uplifting. The proper use of one's Christian freedom is not to flaunt what we *can* do, but to recognize what we *should* do for the benefit of others.

When Paul encountered yet another misuse of Christian freedom in the church at Galatia, he wrote the following: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another (Gal. 5:13).

**?** If, as Paul indicated, our Christian freedom comes with a hefty dose of obligation, then is it really freedom? Why, or why not?



## STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

The subject of freedom lands us in the middle of our society's cantankerous political atmosphere. Some understand freedom primarily in terms of individual and national sovereignty that protects us from those who would impose their will on ours. Others see freedom through the lens of civil liberties, protecting the rights of individuals and groups from those who want those rights for themselves, but not for everyone. Paul's notion of Christian freedom can play an important role in this debate. Let's think about how, as a Christian, to have a conversation about the difficult topic of freedom.

- Recognize that there can be no civil liberties without national sovereignty. Without the freedom from outside interference gained by those who have protected our nation, civil liberties are out of everyone's reach.
- Continue by recounting that civil liberties are the point of national sovereignty. There are countries in the world (like North Korea or Iran) that work hard to maintain their sovereignty, but are their citizens genuinely free?
- Admit that people bring their faith into conversations about politics and what's best for our country, even when we disagree. Separation of church and state does not mean that people can't use their religious convictions to address important issues in our society.
- Be aware that we don't get to expect others to accept our religious convictions about politics just because they are religious. This is not how democracy works.
- Remember the hard-won blessing of religious liberty. The American experiment of religious liberty recognizes that when government favors *one* religion, it opens the door to *disfavoring all* religions.
- Celebrate that our freedom in Christ allows us to bless and serve anyone, regardless of whether we agree with them or not. The cultural conversation about freedom so often spirals down into protecting my stuff or my point of view at the expense of everyone else. Christian freedom seeks the wellbeing of others first, knowing that love and service are the purposes for which God made us free.



**How do Paul's words and your Christian faith make you more or less likely to have a political conversation with someone with whom you disagree?**

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

*The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.*

1. Paul has just written (vv. 9–10): “Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.” He revisits a problem dealt with earlier (5:1–8).
2. The quotation marks in verses 12–13 are not in the Greek text, yet scholars agree that they are quotations from a faction in the church at Corinth. The Spirit faction discounted the body, asserting that since the spirit was separate, bodily activities could not pollute the spirit. Thus, satisfying sexual desire was akin to taking food to satisfy one's hunger. Paul rejects this analogy. Personhood is a psychosomatic unity.
3. Genesis 2:24 (cited in v. 16) applied to marriage, but Paul expands the principle to all intercourse. Scripture taught that God was married to his people (Isa. 54:5–6; Hos. 2:20). Paul connects this idea with believers' unity with Christ in one body.
4. Some Jewish people depicted God's people as a spiritual temple, an image Paul extends (6:19) to individual believers. Some ancient shrines practiced sacred prostitution; in old Corinth, prostitutes were reputed to be dedicated to Aphrodite, their patron goddess.
5. “Redemption,” as in 1:30, means freeing a slave, sometimes by paying a ransom. This price of infinite worth contrasts starkly with the demeaning price paid to hire a prostitute. In the Old Testament, God redeemed, or bought, his people (Exod. 15:13; Ps. 74:2); believers were bought by Christ (1 Cor. 7:23; cf. 5:7).
6. The church has a moral responsibility to the community that goes beyond individual behavior (“All things are lawful for me”). The church exists in the world as the body of Christ, which is the new “temple” (v. 19) where God chooses to dwell. Paul is saying that disputes over dietary laws are of little value in comparison to inappropriate sexual behavior. “The Lord is concerned about bodily behavior because all members of the community share as members (v. 15) in the [risen] body of Christ.