

# ***“The Christian’s Body”***

**1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20**

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Over the past several days, most of us have enjoyed some great food. As we think about the Thanksgiving Dinner that most of us enjoyed, we think back to the Scriptures, and we understand that blessings from God have often included some very good food. In fact, the Bible says quite a bit about food. We think of God’s first words to Adam in Genesis 2:16. There are so many things God could have said first, “Hello!” or “Welcome to earth!” or “I am your Father,” or any number of things, but when we open the Bible and start reading, the first statement from God to the human race comes in Genesis 2:16 where the Lord God said to Adam, ***“From any tree of the garden you may eat freely.”*** Adam, then, was created with a longing for food. That was his first concern, and so the Lord had to tell him what he was allowed to eat. And from that point on, the eating of food is used to illustrate some powerful concepts in the Bible – from the beginning of Genesis all the way through to the end of Revelation, where all people are invited to attend the ***“marriage supper of the Lamb.”*** As with nearly all of God’s blessings, though, there is a danger that something good can be twisted into something bad. We think back again to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve eventually ate what they had been told not to eat, and that act of disobedience caused them to be kicked out of the Garden and to eventually experience death.

We combine all of these thoughts, and it seems very safe to say that God is concerned with what we eat. He wants us to take care of our bodies. And today, it is rather obvious that food plays a rather large role in that. Of course, when we start talking about what the Bible says about taking care of our bodies, the discussion almost always turns to smoking and drinking. And for most of us, the scriptures seem to be rather clear that these things are to be avoided. And yet as we think about smoking and drinking, if we are honest with ourselves, it seems that for most of us food itself is probably the greatest challenge.

And in reality, the consequences are just as devastating. An interesting debate has been going on for the past several years, as researchers have discussed whether it is more dangerous to smoke or overeat. As I understand it, smoking now accounts for more deaths (at around 400,000), but obesity is quickly gaining. Obesity, however, accounts for more visits to the doctor and accounts for a much greater drain on the healthcare system. The problem, then, is widespread. Right now, roughly 70% of all Americans are overweight (having a BMI higher than 25), and more than 1/3 of all American adults are now obese (having a BMI higher than 30). And most of us know the effect that overeating and a lack of physical activity can have on the human body: Heart disease, stroke, Type 2 Diabetes, along with certain kinds of cancer – these are some of the

leading causes of preventable death. According to the Surgeon General, an estimated 300,000 deaths per year can now be attributed to obesity, and that figure is quickly rising.

This morning, then, I would ask: Is there something that we as Christians can do about this? Welcome to your post-Thanksgiving sermon! As a nation, we have gone from a small group of pilgrims seeking religious freedom just barely surviving on the shores of Massachusetts to a nation where the second leading cause of death is basically an abundance of food. Does the word of God have a message of encouragement for us? Does the Bible have anything to say about this epidemic that is now sweeping our nation? With this in mind, I would invite you to turn with me to a powerful passage in 1 Corinthians 6 (p. 1788) – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

This morning, we will not be addressing this issue from a political point of view or an economic point of view. We will not be looking at this in terms of nutrition or psychology, but we will be looking at this issue from God's point of view: What does God want us to know about the care of the human body?

In context, in the second half of 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is warning about the danger of sexual immorality. So, that is the big picture here. However, in making the argument against sexual sin, Paul uses the word **"body"** seven times. In verse 13, Paul refers to the **"stomach"** and **"food."** And he makes that argument to prove that we cannot separate the physical from the spiritual. In other words, he is making the point that how we treat our bodies is directly tied to our spiritual health, and that is the part of this I would like for us to look at this morning. With that in mind, I would invite you to look with me at Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

***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.***

As we look at these two verses, I want us to focus on four very basic concepts concerning our physical bodies.

- I. **And one of the first things we notice right away in verse 19 is that as Christians, OUR BODIES SERVE AS A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

We think of the temple in the Old Testament. The temple was carefully built following God's very detailed instructions, and the temple was so important because it was the place where God chose to live among the people. The temple is the place where God decided to live on this earth. The temple was important. But then we get to the New Testament. At the death of Christ, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, and at that point, the temple lost its significance. And so instead of dwelling in a temple made with hands, the Lord God made a change and decided to live in the hearts of his people instead. And that is why Paul says here that our bodies serve as the temple of God's Holy Spirit.

As Christians, then, God lives in us. God lives in our physical bodies, and in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul was making the argument: Since God is living in us, it matters what we do with our bodies. If we sin, if we abuse the body, if we use the body to commit sexual immorality, then we are involving God himself in that process. For that reason, we are to be careful to only use our bodies for good, not for evil. We think of what Paul said over in Romans 12:1, ***"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."*** A temple, of course, is a place where sacrifice is made, and Paul is teaching here that our bodies are the sacrifice. As we live, we are to use our bodies as tools to carry out the will of God.

What does this mean in terms of our physical health? It means that our bodies need some maintenance. It means that our bodies need some upkeep. As you can imagine, the tabernacle under Moses and the temple under Solomon probably needed some regular maintenance. Right? The Tabernacle and the Temple were both physical buildings, both had many visitors, both were affected by the weather. We think of our own homes today. Our own homes need regular maintenance. This building we are in right now needs regular maintenance. Gutters need cleaning, windows need washing, carpet needs replacing. And in the same way, God's temple today (the human body) also needs maintenance. Our bodies need to be cared for. Our bodies are not to be abused, but they are to be maintained as the temple of God's Holy Spirit. Years ago, I worked on a project at another congregation alongside a godly man who worked as a farmer, and on the farm something was always breaking down. On this project, we were using my tools, but it nearly drove me nuts, because whenever he was done with one of my tools, he would just let it go and drop it on the concrete floor. At that point, I understood why things were always breaking on his farm. But the point here is that our bodies are tools, and tools need to be cared for.

We think of what Paul wrote in Romans 6:12-14, ***“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments [tools] of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments [tools] of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”*** The idea in that little passage is that we are not ruled by our bodies. Instead, as Christians, it is the other way around – we are in charge. We do not let sin rule in our bodies, but we rule. We use our bodies as tools to accomplish the will of God. We think of the song we sometimes sing at camp, “Oh, Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for You.” As Christians, then, every act of sexual sin, every act of drunkenness, every evil thought, every sin we commit is committed in the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies where God has told us His Spirit is living. Paul, then, is giving a gentle reminder here. When it comes to how we treat our bodies, we are to remember that our bodies serve as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

**II. There is a second encouraging word from the apostle Paul here, and that is: As Christians, OUR BODIES ARE NOT OUR OWN.**

In other words, we are talking about a sacred trust, a sacred responsibility. These bodies we have are only ours for a short time. We are basically borrowing these bodies from the Lord, and there is a day coming when we will give an account to God. Notice at the end of verse 19, ***“...do you not know...that you are not your own?”***

In the context of food back in Romans 14:7-8, Paul said, ***“For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.”*** As Christians, even our bodies belong to the Lord. The Lord, therefore, is concerned with how we care for our bodies.

And this is where we get back to the epidemic that continues to destroy the health of this nation. Many so-called Christians are eager to condemn drunkenness (and drunkenness is definitely a sin). It is a sin to get drunk. Abusing alcohol will keep a person out of heaven. But did you know that drunkenness and overeating are put in the same category according to the scriptures? In Proverbs 23:19-21, King Solomon was giving advice to his son and this is what he said,

***Listen, my son, and be wise,  
and direct your heart in the way.***

***Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine,  
or with gluttonous eaters of meat;  
For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty,  
and drowsiness will clothe one with rags.***

So, before we cut on anybody for drinking, before we go removing the speck from our brother's eye, we need to remove the beam from our own eye, and we need to ask ourselves how we personally are doing with the ***"gluttonous eating of meat."*** But the point is: As Christians, our bodies are not our own. Do we see how this is much bigger than drinking or overeating? These are just two of many ways of harming the bodies that have been entrusted to us. Whenever we talk about taking care of the body (as I mentioned earlier), many are very quick to mention smoking. All of us personally have close friends and family who have been harmed by tobacco. This is true in my family. I know it is true in your families as well. We think of the excruciating pain, the disfigurement, the grip that tobacco has on the mind and the body – absolutely amazing! I remember going on a visit with my dad when I was very young. We went to see a woman in the advanced stages of cancer due to smoking. She was in an oxygen tent, and while we were there, she pulled the plastic aside stuck her head out and lit up a cigarette. She died early the next morning. Two days ago, my dad and I got to visit UW Hospital together right after Thanksgiving dinner. We got a call on the church line concerning a Christian man who is here from out of state and is suffering from advanced throat cancer. We obviously don't know what brought that on, but we know the statistics, right? There are some things we do to our bodies that have some long-term effects. Maybe you have heard the saying, "The old man has to live with what the young man does." The point here, though, is: Our bodies are not our own. Instead, our bodies actually belong to the Lord. We are simply stewards. What we do to ourselves we are actually doing to the Lord.

As I was doing the research for this morning's lesson, I ran across a powerful piece of art that puts this concept in a visual picture that maybe we can understand. When we abuse the body, we are violating the sacred trust that has been given to us. Based on the black handprint on the wall, I am assuming this man is using heroin. We see the alcohol there, we see the cocaine, we see the cigarettes – but it could be anything. In our society, it might be more accurate to show this man with a pile of Big Macs. But the point is: What we do to ourselves, we are also doing to the Lord.

I don't say these things just to make any of us feel guilty, but I say these things because this is what God's word has to say about it. According to Paul, we are not our own. That comes from the last part of 1 Corinthians 6:19. We are not our own, but our bodies actually belong to the Lord. Therefore, anything that takes control of our lives in a damaging way is to be avoided.

**III. As we direct our attention back to the word of God, there is a third concept in this passage that applies to our study this morning, and that is: OUR BODIES ARE A SACRED TREASURE.**

Or, as Paul says at the beginning of verse 20, we have been ***"bought with a price."*** When Paul says that we have been ***"bought,"*** he uses a word referring to the ancient marketplace, and it seems as if the idea is that we were slaves on the auction block. The Lord, then, saw us in that situation, and he bought us ***"with a price."*** We cannot help but think of what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:19, where he said that we were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold, but we were bought ***"...with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."*** As God's sacred treasure, then, he cares about us – not just about our spiritual health, but about our physical health as well. As his precious treasure, God cares when we hurt. God cares when we suffer. God cares about what our bodies are going through.

It seems that in our culture today people have gone to two extremes: On one hand, there are some who seem to worship the body itself. Paul warned about that in Romans 1, the danger of worshiping the creature instead of worshiping the Creator. But on the other extreme there are those who worship God, but they totally neglect and ignore God's temple. They completely ignore the body and allow it to fall into disrepair. And it seems in this context that both extremes are spiritually dangerous. So we learn that we have been bought with a price.

IV. **There is one more basic concept in these two verses, and that is: WE ARE TO GLORIFY GOD WITH OUR BODIES.**

As one author has pointed out,

The feet that once led you in sin should now be directed in the paths of righteousness, to the house of God and the place of prayer. The eyes that once looked upon things which violated the law of God should now be directed to the Savior. The ears that once listened to impure things should now be eager to hear the Word of Life. The hands that once were swift to shed innocent blood should now be engaged in the service of the Lord. The tongue that once talked so loosely and glibly should now be singing His praises and telling others of His great love. The heart that was set upon earthly things should now be embracing the things of Christ, and sharing His love with friends and neighbors. [*The Christian's Body*, Curtis Kittrell; www.sermoncentral.com]

To me, that is a pretty good summary of what Paul was saying here. As Christians, we are to glorify God with our bodies.

**Conclusion:**

So, this is what the word of God says. But what does all of this really mean for us? Obviously, we don't have a list of "do's" and "don'ts" here, but what does all of this really mean? I would make several suggestions as we close:

1. First of all, if we struggle when it comes to taking care of God's temple, there is tremendous value in confession and prayer.

The Bible says in 1 John 1:9, "***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***" If we pour out our struggles to God, God has a way of helping us through those struggles. And I would point out that confession and prayer can either public or private. On a number of occasions, we have prayed together as a congregation that a member would be able to stop smoking, for example, and those prayers have been answered. If you are struggling with anything like this, I would encourage you to take it to God first, and then to connect with another member who seems to have come out on the other side. There is power in confession and prayer.

2. I would make a second suggestion based on what we have studied this morning, and that is: Those who do NOT seem to struggle in this area should not look down on those who do, but should offer support and encouragement instead.

It is very easy for any of us with any sin to take on the attitude of the Pharisee toward the Tax Collector in Luke 18:11, the man who arrogantly prayed to himself, "***God, I thank You that I am not like other people:***

**swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.”** I think all of us know some people in tip-top physical condition who are absolute jerks. In the same way, we also know a lot of good-hearted people who struggle with various addictions who are truly struggling to get things under control. Let us remember that the church is to be a hospital for those who are struggling.

In terms of practical support, I might suggest that all of us bring some healthy options to our fellowship dinners and then label those dishes as being friendly to diabetics, for example. Last summer we worshiped at a church in Colorado, and they had a section on their potluck table that was taped off and labeled as being friendly for diabetics. What an awesome way to show support to those who are concerned. On Sundays, we can go places or choose meals that are healthier or smaller in solidarity with our Christian brothers or sisters who might be struggling. Our nutritionist has said that if we absolutely need to go to Culver’s for some reason, that we should get a kid’s meal. I don’t remember the exact numbers, but as I remember it, a kid’s meal is something like 900 calories as opposed to sometimes more than 2,000 calories for an adult meal. She also suggested swapping out mashed potatoes instead of cheese curds. We don’t usually think of mashed potatoes as being healthy, and yet compared to some of the other options, they are actually quite an improvement. I would invite you to check the numbers on this the next time we eat down there. Several times, I have written Craig Culver asking for at least something healthy or sugar free to once again be offered down the street here. I would encourage all of you to do the same. The point is: There are several ways for us to show love and support in this area.

3. I would make a third observation and suggestion based on our study this morning, and that is: Let us reevaluate our spiritual priorities on this issue.

Do you guys know the sin that caused God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? We think we know, and we are right to preach against that sin. But with hundreds of years of hindsight, the prophet Ezekiel cleared it up a little bit. This is what God said through Ezekiel in Ezekiel 16:49-50, **“Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and committed abominations before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen”** (NIV/NASB). Those in Sodom were **“overfed and unconcerned.”** One author has suggested that, “To overindulge in food is, perhaps, to forget that lesson that Jesus learned so powerfully in going entirely without food for forty days: **‘Human beings do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**” At least when it comes to the food part of our discussion this morning, there is a link between our spiritual health and what we eat. We live in a city where children go to bed hungry, where grown men live on the street begging for food. With that in mind, what does it say about us that one of our greatest problems is overeating? Let us be thankful for the food that we have, and let us reach out and help others – as we are doing with Shults-Lewis, and as we are doing with the church food pantry.

There is so much more we could consider on this subject, but our time has come to an end. In the Bible, God has symbolically invited us to a great feast. We accept the Lord’s invitation by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism for the forgiveness of our sins. If you would like to learn more, let us know. If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, we would invite you to write it down and bring your concern to the front. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...