

March 6, 2011  
**Whatever Feels Good – Think About It!**  
1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Joe had it made. His career was taking off. He and his wife had a beautiful, healthy three month old daughter. Then one day, while travelling on business, he had problems with his right hand. He couldn't hold a pen. He kept dropping it. He began to stumble. His right leg wouldn't work properly. His vision was going cloudy. The doctors did an MRI and a spinal and diagnosed Joe as having Multiple Sclerosis. The challenge of MS is that you may be fine, and then suddenly you may become paralysed, or blind, or both.

*"That first night," Joe says, "I lay in bed all night and I just shook. I was terrified. I didn't know what to do." The next day they went back to the doctor who confirmed the diagnosis. "The prognosis is good, but you've got to figure out how to deal with it," the doctor had said. "And that's what we did," Joe says. "Judy and I sat down and we prayer and we prayed and we prayed. And we believed that God will give us the strength we need to deal with this. We're Christians. And we know that God won't give us more than we can handle. Looking back, this MS was one of the best gifts God gave us. It was a real wake up call. All of a sudden I had to realize that my family and my faith were what was really important. I was so busy going up and up in my career I'd lost sight of that. But seeing my own mortality reminded me of what's really important. It's got me back to me roots."*

*"Everything is permissible, but ..."*

*"Everything is permissible for me"* - Paul is QUOTING one of the short, pithy, proverbial sayings popular among the Corinthians. Paul is not saying this. Paul does add, *"But not everything is beneficial"* (6:12). On the one hand, in the right context, the Corinthians' comment is true! There was a group of Christians who insisted that believers had to keep all 613 commandments of the Old Testament laws, from circumcision to diet. Paul emphasizes that we are "free" from those sorts of nit-picky laws (Romans 5-7).

But taken out of context, the slogan invites people to do all sorts of strange things - and the Corinthians apparently were doing just that! Paul explains that Christians still must follow God's basic moral principles - not because we are bound by the law and they affect our salvation - but because many things are not beneficial or good for us. In fact many things can be downright hurtful to us, and they affect our ability to worship God and relate to Him. *"All things are in my power,"* he says, *"but I shall not be overpowered by anything."*

The Corinthians had another saying - *"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy them both"* - which apparently meant they could eat whatever they wanted. Again, drawing the distinction with the strict dietary laws of the Old Testament, this was true. But we

know - don't we - that eating whatever we want, whenever we want, however much we want isn't always best for our bodies! Some things are downright bad for us!

They also applied this "*everything is permissible*" adage to sexual ethics. It was OK to have any kind of sexual relationship (in a town with 1000+ prostitutes that opened up all sorts of possibilities). After all, our bodies are only around for a little while, so why not eat, drink and be merry as much as possible!?!? Both eating and sex seem to be limited to this life, so does it really matter, eternally, what we do here and now?

Paul's reply was: "*The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*" It DOES matter, says Paul! There may be no need for stomachs in resurrection bodies, but we will have resurrection bodies that will somehow reflect our earthly bodies! Sexual promiscuity affects one's whole being - it's more than just a physical act - it's a spiritual union with a person, too. We need to get our priorities straight and recognize that our bodies are the Lord's - we need to treat them in a holy way.

### *"Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit"*

Some religions teach that our bodies don't matter: they are just physical, and what's really important is the spiritual - our souls. Christianity doesn't teach that. It speaks of our bodies as wonderful things - God created them and He loves them! It is significant that, in Jesus Christ, God took on a human body! And when God's Holy Spirit lives within us - as He does in all of us who believe (John 14-16, 1 Corinthians 6:19) - our bodies become holy temples. God dwells in us. A temple (your body) is not something you worship, but it is something you treat with great respect because who is in it - God Himself - is holy.

- **Our bodies are good!** Most of us probably have something we don't like about our bodies - God has nothing at all He doesn't like about your body. Before you were ever born He created you!
- **Our bodies are meant to be enjoyed!** God gives us the ability to enjoy eating, hugging, wearing nice clothes, smelling nice, feeling the warmth of the sun, splashing under a hot shower, listening to music, running, etc., etc. God could have made us so those sorts of things meant nothing to us. But He didn't. He wants us to enjoy our bodies!
- **Our bodies are God's temples, where He dwells.** Some people may say we can do what we like with our bodies because we own them. They're ours. If we feel like abusing them by overeating, smoking, using drugs, etc., that's our business. If we want to be sexually promiscuous, that's up to us. But Christians believe something different. Our bodies are God's temple. Even though God has given us the ability to enjoy our bodies in all sorts of wonderful ways, He also gives us warnings that some things are not in our best interests. They may "feel" good in the short term (like that chocolate bunny or that secret liaison),

but there are long-term consequences. Wherever we are, whatever we do, wherever we go God is there, within us (Psalm 139:7-12). We are His temples.

- **Our bodies should be treated with care.** God wants us to be in control of our bodies, not be controlled by them. So ... we ought to be careful about what we eat (written long before we knew the dangers of trans fats - God knew!). So ... we ought to be careful about our sexual relationships. Our sexuality is to be expressed in marriage. What else?

*"Flee from sexual immorality ..."*

Paul focuses particular attention on the sexual ethics in Corinth. In Corinthian society, sexual promiscuity was quite acceptable. A Greek politician Demosthenes, wrote, *"We keep mistresses for pleasure, concubines for the day-to-day needs of the body, but we have wives in order to produce children legitimately and to have a trustworthy guardian of our homes."* Paul's argument is, just because that's the ethic in the society around you, doesn't mean that it's best for you!

In our culture, we don't encourage prostitution, but you don't have to watch TV very long to know that our culture is obsessed with sex - most often not between husbands and wives! In the media, it's acceptable to have a sexual relationship with a casual acquaintance, to live with someone - or at least have an active sexual relationship - when not married. For a married person, it is acceptable to have a sexual relationship with someone else ... especially if, when your divorce has gone through, you intend to marry the person anyway. It's OK to watch explicit movies or shows. The James Bond approach to sexuality is presented as "normal" in our culture. The Christian idea of sex as specific to a husband-wife relationship is often mocked! Paul's argument to us is just because that's the ethic in society doesn't mean that it's best for you.

Paul uses a three-point argument to defend his position -- not on the basis of law, but on the basis of what's (really!) best for us because of how God created us:

1. **Your body is the Lord's** - it is holy. God, the Holy Spirit, lives within you. He is with you, everywhere, in every circumstance. You are His temple. That's a good thing!
2. **When you have a sexual relationship with someone, it is more than a physical act.** Genesis 2:24 (which Paul quotes) and other passages in Scripture emphasize that there is an emotional and spiritual union that goes with the physical act as well.
3. **Sexual relations with someone joins the Lord with that person as well as yourself.** Since your body is the Lord's temple, therefore, whatever we do with our bodies involves the Lord! It is obviously problematic if the Lord's temple - our bodies - should be in some sort of unholy relationship. The holy temple would no longer be holy. Our bodies are wonderful creations where God dwells - we ought to treat them accordingly.

Sexual promiscuity, Paul suggests, is different from overeating or otherwise indulging our bodies (6:18). Our sexuality is intimately linked with who we are as people. Our self identity. Our self image. Our personal security. Therefore, Scripture emphasizes that while sex is one of God's

wonderful gifts, it is also one of the most precious gifts, to be treasured, guarded, and kept holy within the boundaries of marriage.

*"If it feels good ... think about it!"*

Human nature suggests, *"If it feels good, do it."* What Paul is saying is *"If it feels good, think about it! Look before you leap."* There are always consequences to our actions. At one level, our choices about diet, exercise, smoking, etc. will affect our health. We know that. *"Your body is the Lord's temple,"* Paul reminds us - look after it.

Sex - Paul says - is part of the wonderful way God has created us. But we also have to recognize that the decisions we make about our sexuality will affect our relationships - with other people and with God. Of course there are all sorts of practical reasons for sexual discretion - AIDS and other diseases, unwanted pregnancies, potential abortions. But in all sorts of ways, we may refuse to take God at his word, denying the value of commitment, arguing there are no side effects - and it feels so good! But time and again we regret those choices. There is a price to pay. There always is. There are mental, emotional, even physical scars that can be substantially healed by God's grace, but never totally disappear.

But the real reason for a Christian emphasis on sexual purity is that sexual relations imply an emotional and spiritual coming together as well as a physical one. That's how we, as people, are created. It's how God made us. That's who we are. It's fundamental to our humanity. Expressed in the context of an open, loving, permanent marriage, our sexuality binds us together so *"the two become one."* Expressed outside of marriage, sexuality can never be truly satisfying - the emotional and spiritual part isn't there. It becomes simply a physical act. It may leave us feeling emotionally, mentally and physical scarred.

Back to Joe. Discovering his MS made him sit up and think about what was really important in his life. He career may not have been as important as it seemed. He needs to live differently. He needs to spend more time with his family. He needs to spend more time with God.

What about you? Some of you - or members of your families - have serious medical problems. And I know you, like Joe, have had to deal with them. You cope. You come back to what is really important. You know how precious - and fragile these temples are! But what about the rest of us? What is really important to you? How do you live? Do you value your relationship with God? Do you value your relationship with your family? Do you treat your body like a temple - in terms of what you eat, how you live, what you watch? *"You are not your own,"* Paul reminds us, *"You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body."* (6:19-20)

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