

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
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Brad Jackson  
The Christian Atheist: I Believe in God, but It's My Body  
I Corinthians 6:9-20**

My name is Brad Jackson, and yes, it really is me. I haven't been around in the morning for about three months. I have hair now. Okay, clap for that. After a decade of shaving the head, I decided to let the hair grow, and this is what you get. There are a few truly bald guys who are mad at me. A friend said, "You were shaving your head but you weren't really bald. Really?" It was like that was a foul ball of some kind.

Let me also say this on the front side. We are talking about sex this morning. I tried all week to make our passage for today not talk about sex, but it talks about sex. I say that because I know there are a lot of different ages in here, and I just want to put in a disclaimer. I really think my message is PG. I have a six and an eight-year-old, and I would keep them in here, but I want to say on the front side, I will say these words a lot so when you get in the car, if you have a younger child, you will have some questions. My little daughter Trinity was in here last weekend when I mentioned at The Table that I was going to talk about sex, and all week she has been talking about the "S" word! So, it will be a conversation. With all that said, let us go to the Lord in prayer.

God, this is a challenging subject, our bodies and sex, and so, Lord, I pray that You would give us grace. Lord, we are not going to cover everything that there is about this subject. It is going to be challenging and so, Lord, I pray that Your Spirit would be here in maybe just an extra special way, that we would listen to what You have to say, and that You would challenge us to be more like Yourself, Jesus Christ. We pray this in Your Name. Amen.

We are in the last week of a series we are calling "The Christian Atheist". The premise of this series is that there are certain places in our lives where we confess to follow Jesus, but we ultimately leave God out of the picture. We have talked about the issue of control. We have talked about the issue of sharing our faith, and last week we talked about the issue of money, so we just sort of figured if we haven't already gotten everybody mad, we would talk about sex.

This is a subject where we often leave God out of the picture. Last week, on Sunday night at The Table, I told the crew I was more apprehensive to talk about money a whole weekend than I was to talk about sex. Now that I am talking about sex, I lied!

This is a tough topic for a lot of reasons. It is personal. It is complicated, and in our society, it is challenging. Throughout this series we have tried to talk about the "why" of what it is that causes us to leave God out of certain areas of our lives. Why do I leave God out of money? Why do I leave God out of talking about Him? Why do I leave God out of the issue of sex? I think at the

core of why we leave God out of these places is not that we don't love God. I think it's not even because there are questions around; is God really good or is God faithful or is God just? I think at the core of why we leave God out is that other voices win out over God and the Bible. The voices that speak louder are usually centered around our culture or the experiences that drive us to live in certain ways or even worldviews that for some reason, knowingly or unknowingly, win out over God and Scripture. Michael Craven, who leads the Center for Christ & Culture, and writes on culture and sexuality says this:

The secular humanist argues that sexual morality is an artificially constructed concept that is unfairly foisted upon society by religious institutions primarily and other 'unenlightened' moralists. The Humanist Manifesto II, drafted in 1973, condemned 'intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures that unduly repress sexual conduct.'

Listen to this next part.

The Manifesto went on to say that 'individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their lifestyles as they desire.'

This thinking has impacted and influenced our culture and our worldview when it comes to our bodies and sex and sexuality. We are a sexually open, sexuality stimulated culture. One in four internet hits is from somebody searching for pornography. Sex before marriage and sex outside of marriage have become the norm in our society in TV, movies, our neighborhoods, our schools, and our lives. I think because we are such a sexually open and stimulated society, it is no wonder that it has affected our understanding and relationship to our bodies in the issue of sex. This intensity and openness around sex and our bodies has, I think, led us to many broken and unhealthy places. I asked a friend what this solicited in her mind. She wrote this back to me. I thought it was so good. Here is what she said.

Most people do not worship God with their bodies. Whether they drink too much, don't exercise, don't sleep, cut, don't eat enough, eat more than their bodies need, if you only eat junk, if you exercise too much, if you stress out, smoking, dressing inappropriately, sexual promiscuity, not having sex in your marriage....

Then she said,

These are just the ways we can see. There are all the other unseen ways we don't worship God with our bodies. In the mornings, lots of people wake up, weigh themselves, and let that number become their new god. We end up worshipping another god all because of how we feel about our bodies. The god of weight. Some let that number, good or bad, rule the rest of the day, their emotions, where their thoughts go.

She ends with this.

We are all following something, whether it's Jesus, celebrities, peer pressure, sex....

The list goes on and on. Anne Lamott says, "For too long and despite what people told me, I had fallen for what culture said about beauty, youth, features, heights, weights, hair textures,

upper arms.” If you’ve not read Ann, do, she’s just a fun read. I think these two women help us understand that the deeper issues are just that. It is not simply that we are a sexually open culture but what that sexual openness ends up doing to us as individuals, as people of God who buy into such thinking and living. As a father of two young girls, this is constantly on my mind. Will my daughters grow up to be defined by their relationship to Jesus Christ or by what culture tells them about their bodies and sexuality?

With all that said, and before we jump into this challenging text of Scripture this morning, let me say two things because I think they matter as we talk about something that is this sensitive. The first is this. I think 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 is right when it says that we see through a glass dimly. Not one of us has all the answers on this topic, but we try together to see what it means to follow Jesus and submit to the narrative of Scripture. The second thing is that I think all of us are sexually broken people. This plays out differently throughout this room, but from Scripture it says, “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” So with both of these things in mind and keeping and holding them in a sensitive way, let’s jump into it.

We are going to be in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6. Corinth was a major city in the first century. It was wealthy and prosperous. It was an important commercial center and the capitol city of Achaia, so there were people of many different nationalities and cultures. These factors contributed to the excessive sexual immorality that characterized Corinth, as did the temple of Aphrodite, one of twelve pagan temples in Corinth. Aphrodite was the pagan goddess of love. It has been said that more than one thousand temple prostitutes offered their sexual services as part of the worship of Aphrodite. By AD 50, the sexual immorality of Corinth was so infamous that the term to *Corinthianize* was coined to denote living in sexual immorality.

Corinth was a dark city. It was bound by worldly wealth and commerce, paganism and heathen religions, sexual immorality and drunkenness, and the love of human philosophy and wisdom. It was within this culture, within this setting in this major city that Paul writes to this new, little, fledgling church. It was a church that had many struggles. They had leadership issues. They had sexual issues. They had money issues and issues between the rich and the poor. It was a church that had many gifts, but all too often let sin and brokenness get the loudest voice. With all that in mind let’s jump into 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6. The previous chapter was dealing with sexual issues around incest. In the first part of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6, Paul is dealing with two Christians who were taking each other to pagan court, and Paul is saying again and again, “Those are not the witnesses we are called to be to the world around us.”

<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals <sup>10</sup> nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The list in that passage is challenging. In the first century it was called a vice list, a common literary practice at that time. Two things about a vice list. One is, it’s not meant to be comprehensive. If you have a sin that is controlling you that wasn’t in that list and you are sitting there thinking, I can just keep on with it, the Bible didn’t list that one. I am okay. The list is not meant to be comprehensive, but it *is* meant to make the statement that sin is sin. The list is

huge - sex outside of marriage, sex that seems permissible in the culture, practicing homosexuality, sex with the prostitutes at the temple. And then the stuff we forget like thievery, greed, drunkenness, gossip, dishonest business people. That is what that last word is.

Paul is saying to them that the ways listed are normal in the kingdom of the world. In fact, it is probably applauded and celebrated in the kingdom of the world. It is pleasure of the moment. It is what is easy. Paul is saying, "You have bought into it. You have bought into this way of thinking." But he is telling them that in the Kingdom of God it is very different. It is a different reality and sometimes it is challenging. The way Paul is going to call this community toward understanding of their bodies and sexuality is not easy. It is much, much easier but much more painful in the long run to go the way of the kingdom of the world.

Dallas Willard says this (I just love his definition of the Gospels), "Through faith in Jesus we can live in the Kingdom of God now." I think that sums up this passage. When we put our faith in Christ, we can begin to live in a very different way than in the kingdom of world. That is the call that Paul is giving them. He is saying that for people who put their faith in Christ, actively choosing to live in a way that doesn't represent the Kingdom of God is wrong. Please get my wording there. It is not, if you struggle with this, then you can't be a Christian. That is not the point at all. Paul is saying, actively choosing to live in a way that is against the Kingdom of God is wrong.

Let's keep going, verse 12. In the first few verses, Paul is going to use some common philosophical and worldly arguments of the day for doing whatever you wanted, that humanistic worldview we talked about.

<sup>12</sup> "I have the right to do anything," you say....

And Paul comes back with

—but not everything is beneficial.

In the kingdom of the world you sort of do, but is it beneficial? Paul comes into it again.

"I have the right to do anything"....

And Paul says,

—but I will not be mastered by anything.

That word *mastered* means I will not *be made a slave to*, which around the issue of sex and sexuality is such an important thought. I will not be made a slave to anything.

<sup>13</sup> You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food...."

I will just argue that you can do what you want. We are humans. We are made with needs. You don't have to act on them.

"...and God will destroy both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup> By his power God raised the Lord from the

dead, and he will raise us also. <sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?

Sex is always more than just sex.

For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” <sup>17</sup> But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

All that stuff at the end, I think, is getting around to this. It is telling the story that sex is actually God’s idea, which is such an important thing for us to hold onto if you confess a sin in your body. The idea of sex was God’s idea. This is the language of the Jew, “The two will become one flesh.” It goes all the way back to the beginning of the Old Testament. In the covenant between a man and a woman, God created sex as this intimate union. In the narrative of the Old Testament, it is for pleasure, it is for joy, and it is for offspring. It was God’s idea. Paul is saying in the resurrection language he uses here, that in the way we live, we hope for the ultimate resurrection when things are made right again, and the new creation looks like the original creation. How we live out sexually matters. Let’s go to verse 18.

<sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins people commit are outside their bodies, but those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies.

There is a weight to sexual sin. It is not better or worse, but there is a weight, there is an effect from it that is different from any other sin.

<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

That word *sexual immorality* is a general term. It is the Greek word *porneia*, meaning to engage in sexual immorality of any kind, anything that is against God’s intent. Then Paul uses this temple language which is absolutely beautiful. It comes from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament they went to the temple to encounter God. It was a holy place where you met with God, and it was where God dwelt. The temple was ornate. It was magnificent because you met God there. Now Paul says, “In this new covenant” that Jesus Christ made with those who confess Christ, who follow Christ, who have been saved. However you want to put it, you walk around as temples. Not only is God in you, but you are the temple of God walking around.

As I read through 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6 there are a few things that pop into my mind, and two of them are challenges and I think one is an invitation. Let’s start with the challenges. The first one is this: **There is no such thing as casual sex**, as the voice of our culture tells us. I think this is so clear in this passage. There is no such thing as casual sex. My good friend Dave Johnson up at Church of the Open Door has done a great series around this topic. One of the things he says time and time again is this: “Sex is so much more than skin on skin. Sex is so much more than just a physical interaction.” Verses 12 through 17 tell us there is more at stake than people just having sex. There something mysteriously uniting that goes on when people have sex that goes well beyond body parts.

I often hear people say something like this, “Who am I really hurting by having sex with someone I really like? As long as we are both into it, I don’t think there is anything wrong with sex. I am not hurting myself, and I am not hurting him or her.” Paul is telling this community that when they have sex with someone, they are uniting their spirits. That is the one body language. When we have sex outside of marriage, we are uniting our spirit in ways that will make it much more difficult to unite with another person once we are married. We are hurting our ability to unite and bond with our future spouse, and we are hurting their ability to unite and bond with their future spouse. We all know that the moment sex becomes part of a relationship, everything changes. Everything gets more serious and complicated. This can apply to an extramarital affair, pornographic addiction, and so on.

Challenge No. 2, and this is straight from the text: **flee sexual immorality**. Paul is saying you can and you must flee sexual immorality. I think we buy into the lie that humans need active sexual experiences in order to be fully alive. This is one of the things our culture tells us. I think that even in the church, we have bought into this lie. We think that if we struggle with sex, whatever it may be for you or however it might be working out for you, that this struggle simply cannot be won. This is how we are made so it’s just going to happen. Put most simply, the subtle voice we hear tells us that our sexual urges are uncontrollable, so watch out.

Think about the different situations that you get into and how you think and how you struggle with them. Do I go on a business trip alone with someone of the opposite sex who is not my spouse? How do I set up meetings with people of the opposite sex? Should I date someone who is not a Christian? Should I be watching a certain show or movie or go to a certain internet site? Do the images really matter? And you could add your questions to this.

I think there is obvious wisdom in setting boundaries in our relationships and knowing our levels of temptation. How do we control our sexual urges? By not crossing the lines, and the lines are different for all of us. It might be the subtle flirting, the appropriate but suggestive touching, trying to get alone together when you know it is not the right thing. I think we all need to set boundaries and know that it *is* possible to control our sexual urges and flee sexual immorality. Flee means getting serious about this. If you are married and you and your spouse have not talked about the boundaries you are going to have with people of the opposite sex, do it. If you are in a dating relationship or thinking about it and you have not thought through your boundaries, please do it. If you are struggling with something when it comes to internet, pornography, please think through boundaries and accountability. Flee sexual immorality, and we can.

Paul ends with a holy invitation, and it is this: **Honor God with your bodies**. Paul has used strong language. He has made strong calls, but at the end of the day, he says, “Honor God with your bodies.” What does it mean to recognize that you are not the only one calling the shots as it relates to your body? Let me say that again because I think this really matters. What does it mean to know that you are not the only one calling the shots in relation to your body? You have the very presence of God in you. If you follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the actual presence of God, resides in you. You walk around as a temple of God. You by God’s grace can be the master of your body and not the other way around. I think too often we are lazy Christians. What would it look like to begin to train your body in such a way that the urges of the flesh did not master you?

I remember in seminary going to my counseling professor. I sat down in his office and admitted

to some struggles I was having around sex and sexuality. I expected him to look at me and say, "You are in seminary. You should be over that struggle," and kick me out of the office, kick me out of school. But instead, he talked with me and prayed with me. He showed me Philippians 2:12-13, which has been a partner for me since then. Here is what that passage says.

<sup>12</sup> ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

This is an athletic term. Sweat, toil, do the right thing. Put the right boundaries in place. Have the right accountability. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because here is the deal. It is going to be a lifelong journey. None of us will attain perfection this side of eternity. It is a lifelong journey. And then verse 13

<sup>13</sup> For it is God who is working in you....

The best thing my professor ever said was, "You are going to sweat and you are going to toil. You are going to put the right things in place. You are going to have the right conversations with your wife. You are going to put up boundaries. You are going to do what you need to do, but you are always going to know that the power, the energy that allows you to do that, is God Himself." It takes work to honor God with your body, but it is worth it because you are the temple of God. The way we live as individuals and as a community tells the world a very different story, that the Kingdom of God is good and beautiful. It is not always easy. It is sometimes very challenging, but it is always good and beautiful. "You have been bought at a price," the price being Jesus Christ Himself. "Therefore, honor God with your bodies."

Heavenly Father, God I would pray that You would do exactly what You need to do in each person. God, this is one of those topics we rarely talk about, that we don't like to talk about, but it is part of the journey for each of us. God, I pray for each person in this room, that they would know Your grace, that they would be challenged to become whole, to live in Your Kingdom, knowing that we can do it because You reside in us. I pray this in Your Name. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*