

God's temple

The New Testament letters are a special gift from God as they address significant doctrinal issues and the practical applications of beliefs to our daily living. We begin



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four lessons focused on our physical body as a gift from God, beginning with our sexuality. My television announced last night a new series on sex that will focus on gratification and aberration, rather than the body as "God's temple." Our world views life from a "feel good" perspective: let's do what is fun without considering the consequences. This approach to life has resulted in shattered marriages, ill health and ruined careers.

Earlier in Paul's letter he says that a Christian evaluates life and does not accept the world's flawed values because we "have the mind of Christ." (1 Corinthians 2:15-16). Paul focuses on personal responsibility and discipline, using the image of a runner who competes (lives) to win the victor's crown. (1 Corinthians 9:25).

Paul also points out that a believer does not live isolated from the world. You are not the center of the universe. Consider how your actions will impact the lives of others. (1 Corinthians 10:24).

Christianity is much more than a system of beliefs to memorize, rituals to perform or membership in a club that offers you special favors and success. Paul's strict Jewish heritage emphasized the Jerusalem Temple as the one sure place to experience God's presence, and keeping the Law as the evidence he was truly one of God's chosen.

Paul, now a devout disciple of Jesus, has dramatically changed his

perspective. In 1 Corinthians 6, he explains that God is now present in the person and living of those who have accepted salvation through Christ: "God's temple is holy, which is what you are" (3:16-17, CEB). "Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you? Don't you know that you have the Holy Spirit from God, and you don't belong to yourselves?" (6:19).

The issue of morality for Christians is based on this key idea: "You have been bought and paid for, so honor God with your body" (v.20). How you live and treat your body is how you treat God! We may think about our actions and be motivated to eat healthy, exercise and develop our minds, which is good. But take the longer pathway and recognize that behavior and relationships show the world who you are, either self-serving or faithful to God.

Corinth was a significant Roman center of trade, wealthy, cosmopolitan and filled with pagan temples. Both male and female prostitutes were connected with some of the temples. Sexual immorality was accepted, which fit into the predominant philosophy of experiencing all life has to offer and doing as you please.

This is why Paul argues for sexual purity by writing: "Don't you know that anyone who is joined to someone who is sleeping around is one body with that person?" (v.16). According to Genesis 2:24, when you engage in sexual intercourse, you become one flesh with that person. To commit sexual immorality is to defile Christ as well as your spouse. A person is not separate from his body. Your relationships and actions declare who you are, who you love and what is truly valuable to you.

Formations

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Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:15-20

As a pastor I heard it all: the woman whose husband saw nothing wrong with having a mistress on the side as long as he supported his family and lived at home; the teenager who told me it was none of my business or God's if she slept around; the man who explained biblical teachings about sex were simply out of date! Such ideas reflect ancient Greek thinking that we are in fact divided into two distinct parts: flesh and spirit. But the Jewish concept is we are both, and you cannot pull the two apart and have different goals or purposes for each.

Let's not get lost in a rant against pornography, although in our day the Internet has contributed significant information about deviant sexual behavior and the abuse of children. I have witnessed the tragic harm visited on adults as well as children who have been trapped in a home, school, workplace or even church when someone trusted or in authority took sexual advantage over another.

As followers of Christ, we must understand that sexuality is God's gift, a part of our human makeup, to be used in the context of faithful marriage and with respect and love. God did not make up flawed or unnecessary laws for living.

We are created with the potential for a fulfilling and blessed life, but the choices are ours. We honor God and bear witness to his grace by all we say and do, including the area of sexuality.

Retired after 45 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.