

GRACE AND PEACE IN CHRIST JESUS

TEXT: *1 Cor. 6:13b Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*

DEAR FELLOW REDEEMED:

St. Paul would have been hard pressed to found a Christian congregation in a place that was more hostile and contrary to the Christian message than Corinth; except maybe Rome,

Corinth was founded by the Dorians around 800 BC. The Dorians had a reputation for immorality. They are credited by most sources for making homosexuality culturally acceptable throughout Greece. In the centuries before Christ Corinth was known for its temple to Aphrodite which is said to have employed a thousand prostitutes. Xenophon of Corinth donated a 100 young girls as prostitutes there as a gift of thanksgiving to Aphrodite after having won the Pentathlon in the Olympics. Prostitution accounted for a large part of the city's revenue. Aristophanes coined the term 'korinthiazomai' meaning 'I act like a Corinthian' in reference to sexual immorality. Plato described women given to prostitution as "Corinthian girls" in "The Republic."

By St. Paul's day Corinth had been conquered and refounded by Julius Ceasar, the temple was smaller, the prostitutes fewer, but the legacy of immorality was just as strong. As a Roman city Corinth was ripe with adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, and even rape. The ideal Roman male was strong and assertive. He may be married for the sake of having children, but he would not be bound to limit his sexual activity to his wife alone. He would have other lovers on the side, male and female alike, it was his right, it was expected.

It makes perfect sense that it was here in Corinth were Paul had to address incest within the Christian community. Sexual confusion of the worst kind permeated their society.

Here, of all places, God sent St. Paul to proclaim Christ. When God sent Jonah to Nineveh, Jonah literally ran in the opposite direction because Nineveh was so evil and godless that he didn't want God's Word to be preached among them. I wonder if Paul didn't feel like a little like Jonah at times. I mean Corinth of all places! It was a flesh market! A hellhole.

And yet there in the middle of that grotesque evil, God planted His church. In the book of Acts we told about Paul's ministry in Corinth and that *many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.*

What they heard, believed, and were baptized into, went against everything taught to them by their parents and grandparents. St. Paul didn't just shake up their understandings about God, He overthrew their entire worldview and replaced it with a new one.

The God St. Paul proclaimed was totally alien to any of the false gods they believed in before. They believed that their old Roman gods lived apart from humanity in a far-away mountain, watching humanity, manipulating their lives for their own personal amusement. They were gods who inflicted suffering and demanded homage. St. Paul preached Christ as God who became one with the fleshly stuff of this world, in order to rescue mankind from eternal destruction.

Christ put Himself into the hands of wicked people and let their rage against God vent on Him. God, became flesh and let His people murder Him. Every form of god the Corinthians ever heard of demanded people bring him or her sacrifices, but Paul preached a God who became the sacrifice for humanity. He took up the life of a man so He could lay it down for people who had corrupted their flesh and misspent their lives. Jesus died so the guilty might be reconciled to God the Father.

Even though the wickedness in Corinth ran deep, Paul made sure they knew that Christ's saving grace ran deeper. His saving work radiated out far beyond the borders of Israel. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Which included even the people of Corinth whose minds and hearts had been so badly damaged by the godless culture in which they lived.

It was radical to think that God would choose to lower Himself into a life of human flesh and blood. He was a God who operated in the realm of the real, the tangible, the concrete. He was touchable. There was an verifiable history of his life, death and resurrection.

And such a God of the physical and tangible was a God who claimed people at the same level. The One True Triune God was not interested in spiritual devotion. He redeemed people from lives of impurity. He erased the gritty sin of daily life and created new beings to live in His image now in this world in real time.

Paul preached, ***“The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and lord for the body.”***

There in the middle of this sea of temptation in Corinth, God's stamp of forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ meant God's holiness was manifest in their daily lives. Their very bodies belonged to the Lord, and Lord had joined himself to their flesh.

Again Paul told them, ***“do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God.”***

Jesus had not just reconciled the whole of the world to Himself, He had also reconciled whole of each individual person to Himself. He was the Savior of their bodies not just their souls. The same bodies many of them had joined to prostitutes. The same bodies that had yielded to lust and adultery and homosexuality. God, in His infinite grace was joined even to their sin stained flesh.

The people of Corinth had never heard anything like this. They knew what they had done with their bodies. What a radical message, that God would choose to join His holiness and purity, His very being, to such flesh!

God's Word told them that He not only would do this, but had done it already. Paul said, "***your bodies are members of Christ.***" Present tense – "***are members.***" Their flesh was already joined to His flesh. It happened in their baptisms. God washed away their former lives of corruption and immorality and joined Himself, with all the holiness and purity that He is, to the same bodies that bore the marks of sin.

This was no distant Savior; Christ was there with them in the present, in their depths, in their flesh that went to work, and lived in the community, and walked past brothers every day. This is the message that our gracious God still brings to us.

We are claimed body and soul by Christ. Our stinking flesh with its terrible record of evil and corruption has been invaded by God's Spirit and joined to the Almighty. Our bodies are members of Christ. The water that washed over our head in Holy Baptism was a flood of divine power where God joined the whole of us to Himself and forever changed who we are and how we live. He confirms this flesh to flesh salvation each time we go to His Supper and eat His body and drink His blood. He gives us all of Himself so He might claim all of each of us. Having the whole of us claimed and redeemed by Jesus changes everything in our daily lives.

Paul made clear to the Corinthians that now that God's purity was part of them, their lives were to be sexually pure. Being joined to God meant rejecting the sexual immorality around them and living new lives as children of grace. In Ephesus Paul uses the same doctrine of Christological bodily union to explain Christian marriage,

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church

In Rome Paul applied this Christological union to their life in the Church and care for their fellow believers,

so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Time after time and place after place Paul proclaims a Christ who has united His body to us and our bodies to Him. He has made the whole of us His own.

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

This is no shallow moralism that ignores the problem of sin and tries to paint a happy face on horses behinds. God knows our corruption. He knows what evils live within us and how we pollute our flesh. This Gospel preached to us aims at the core of who we are. We are temples of the Holy Spirit. Even living in the middle of a world no better or more clean than the Corinth of St. Paul's day, we are Christ's.

What wonders the love of God has worked among us! AMEN