

St Paul's Dorking Small Group Notes w/c 29th May 2016

1Corinthians 6: 12-20 Intentional Discipleship- The Body

In this passage, Paul quotes a misconception that the Corinthian Christians had, which was that they could do anything with their physical bodies now they have freedom in Christ. Paul is clear that this is not the right concept of freedom! He then focuses mainly on sexual immorality, but his words have a broader application as we think about the implication of Christian faith not just for our spiritual life, but for our physical life.

Paul is clear that 'I have the right to do anything' (v12) is wrong; whilst Christ has taken away sin this is not a licence to carry on with what we know is wrong. He focuses on what living in the freedom of Christ means for how we treat our bodies. Paul says unequivocally (v13) 'The body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body'. And in v19-20 'our bodies belong to God'. So, our bodies are part of our Christian living, of our discipleship!

The Bible describes man as spirit, soul and body. We cannot commit sin with our bodies without damaging our souls because they are inseparably joined. The body does not just matter in order to give you a long and healthy and fulfilled life; God calls us to look after our bodies because He loves them and sees them as an integral part of the transformed, saved people that He calls us to be,

If we contrast the effects of positive sexual behaviour against negative behaviour, we can easily see why our physical actions are important. God knows its power to destroy us physically and spiritually. We live in a corrupt world; we are tempted to do damaging things to others and to ourselves, or at best not to use our bodies as positively as God calls us to. So what does God call us to do, to protect ourselves from this?

Firstly, **we are meant to love our own bodies, just as God does.** But as our society grows more obsessed with sex as gratification, and as media educates us into a distorted sense of body image, we get more and more out of love with our own bodies. Many people don't feel ok about how they look, and this leads to many kinds of bodily abuse, including self-harming and a damaged relationship with food, but also other less obvious things like a reluctance to have a healthy sexual relationship within a marriage. It is important that we recognise that being Christian does not bring immunity from this lack of self-worth. We need to recognise that there is no shame when these problems comes to us, and we need to collectively rejoice and support those who are brave enough to recognise a problem and seek to deal with it.

Secondly, of course **we are also not meant to love our bodies more than God** does! We are meant to honour God with them, not ourselves. Liposuction procedures, anti-wrinkle creams; should we instead by celebrating the sign of aging? Exercise is good, but it can become an obsession; there are many ways to record your Personal Best and to compete virtually as well as literally with others.

For we find that in our love for life –which God says is good- things like exercise, but more particularly chemical or sexual pleasures- can become over important, even addictive. Whilst the Bible says wine gladdens heart, it also warns us not to get drunk. Whatever we do with our bodies, it must not become our master. We need to be intentional in identifying where we are inappropriately dependent on a physical habit, or where we are not caring for our bodies as God intended. Discipleship is an apprenticeship; we are underqualified for the 'job' but God simply wants us to 'Get In'- to be intentional in growing into the people he wants us to be. And then we will 'Go Far'. We do not need to work FOR our salvation- we already have it-, but we do need to work OUT our salvation, growing into the people God intends us to be.

If we want to be intentional, we need to first state what we think we want to change. **Be Specific and seek a positive change.** Then we need to use our community; who is the Christian you trust to whom we can state your truth, and be accountable for change? We need to help each other to Be Specific and **Be Accountable.**

Don't feel overwhelmed; God loves you as you are; He just wants to make you into a brighter, more beautiful version of who you are. As we come to church to present our worship to God, we should not be only offering him our minds and our souls; we must also find ways to present our bodies as a temple of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 12 v1)

Questions for your group to consider

1. Have you thought about your body as part of your Christian life? Why do bodies matter? Do you identify with the fact that God loves our bodies? Why is this hard sometimes to believe?
2. What do you see as the biggest body-issues in our culture and why? Maybe explore one in detail.
3. Are Christians as likely to get body-issues as others? How can we help them deal with the guilt they might feel?
4. Explore the model of Be Specific and Be Accountable. Some people might want to share areas of their lives for change, but you could do this quietly and prayerfully on your own, and write down ideas.
5. What qualities do the person who takes on the role of 'Someone to be Accountable to' need to have?