

This sermon delivered by
Dr. Roswell Presbyterian Church
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“Since Jesus is Lord ... Of My Physical Body”
I Corinthians 6:12-20

I don't know if I should admit this or not, but I have this really unique collection of songs on my Ipod which I listen to when I exercise. I try to get lost in the music I'm listening to so that I won't be reminded how out of shape I am. Anyway, one of the songs is a Bon Jovi song that is sort of this “in your face” statement to the world.

If there's one thing I hang onto, that get's me through the night. I ain't gonna do what I don't want to, I'm going to live my life. Shining like a diamond, rolling with the dice, standing on the ledge I show the wind how to fly. When the world gets in my face, I say, “Have a nice day.”

I like the song, and it takes my mind off the exercise. But have to admit, I'm a little bothered by the words. “I ain't gonna do what I don't want to. I'm going to live my life.” Now if that means that I'm not going to let other people set my agenda, I suppose that's a good thing.

But if it's sort of a modern version of “I did it my way,” then I'm a little uncomfortable with it. The fact is, when I became a Christian I said to God, “it's not my life anymore. My life belongs to you. What I want to do is to live the life you want me to live.”

That's what it means to say, “Jesus is Lord.” It means to say that Jesus is charge. As my theology professor Shirley Guthrie used to say, “We don't vote him into office.” He already is Lord. The issue is, Are we living with that realization? Are we living with the knowledge that Jesus is in charge of our lives?

Jesos Kurios - “Jesus is Lord.” It was an affirmation of faith from the early church, perhaps the earliest affirmation of faith in the church. It was the foundation of the early church. Jesus is Lord.

“Lord” isn't a term we use much anymore. But the first century world knew it well. It was a title of respect and authority; and when used of God, it spoke of ultimate respect and ultimate authority.

Jesus is Lord—He's in charge—and the scriptures are clear: He's in charge not just of my spiritual life—but of all of my life. Jesus cares about our whole being. With that in mind, over the next few weeks, we're going to explore several areas of our lives and look together at what it means to say Jesus rules over first, our physical body; then our emotions; the next week our home, and last, our future.

I could have picked any of dozens of areas. I've selected these four. What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord of my physical body, my emotions, my home, and my future?

Well, let's jump right into the first of the four. What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord of my physical existence, my physical body? To get ready for today's sermon, I've gone on a diet. I've worked out several times, and I've tried to get a good night's sleep each night. And, oh yes, I did spend some time with a passage of Scripture which speaks of God's concern for our physical body. It's from the sixth chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Let's look at it together. Listen now to the Word of God.

—Read I Corinthians 6:12-20—

This is our first in the series of sermons exploring the Lordship of Jesus. To say that I am a Christian means that I look to Christ as in charge of not just of my spiritual life, but of all my life. And so for today, we ask ourselves, What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord even of this physical body?

I have to tell you, this isn't a subject I've addressed very often. But when you look around our culture, at all the emphasis placed on physical appearance and beauty, and all the billions of dollars spent on trying to look good, it seems like a subject we can't avoid.

Now when I first began to deal with this passage, it seemed awfully harsh. I kept feeling like God was going to make me feel guilty for any slip in my diet, for any mistake I made. With every M&M I sneak, I heard this voice saying, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." It seemed pretty tough.

But then I realized that at its heart, this really is a word of good news—and it's a word our culture would do well to hear.

The very last verse—verse 20—has a powerful image: "You were bought with a price." It's an interesting image: God made us, and then he set us free, but then he bought us back.

"You were bought with a price." In the Greek, the verb tense points to a decisive, specific event. Paul doesn't state what that event was—but he doesn't need to. We know he's talking about the cross.

On the cross, Jesus offered his life. He offered his love, not just for our spiritual life, but for all of us—body, soul, and mind—God's Son died for us just the way we are. That's what grace is all about. God's love is given freely. We don't earn it or deserve it. God loves us just the way we are. It seems odd to say it, but God loves us whatever shape our body is in.

We live in a society that is obsessed with putting itself down physically. We live in a culture that is obsessed with changing the body God gave us. We live in a society that says you have to have a certain look, a certain shape to be accepted, to be part of the in crowd.

Gloria Vanderbilt said a few years ago, "You can never be too rich or too thin." And so many in our culture are buying into that myth. Americans are obsessed with changing what God has given us. And for many teenage girls, the Gloria Vanderbilt myth has led to dangerous bouts with

anorexia and bulimia. When Gloria Vanderbilt said you can never be too thin she was wrong. And I'm sorry to say in some cases she was dead wrong.

The first thing I want our culture—the first thing I want us—to hear from this passage is that God made us—and he even bought us back—flaws and all. **GOD LOVES US AND ACCEPTS US JUST THE WAY WE ARE.**

Several years ago, I preached a sermon entitled “Mr. Rogers Goes to Church”. It was about “Mr. Rogers,” the children’s show on TV. How long has it been off the air? I wonder what age you have to be to remember Mr. Rogers. But what a great message he had. I wish our culture could believe it. You remember what he said every day? Day after day, he would walk in the room, put on his cardigan sweater, change his shoes, and looks out at us and says, “I’ve always wanted to have a friend just like you.”

That's the good news God has for us. Flaws and all, God says through this passage: I paid an enormous price for you—I've always wanted to have a friend just like you.

That's not the message of our culture. Our society is obsessed with physical beauty. We're so quick to judge people based on their physical condition. And by the way, who first invented the word “ugly?” Where do we get that word? How did we decide some people are ugly and some aren't? God didn't do that. The God we worship sees beyond the physical. He loves us just the way we are.

Dr. Paul Brand tells the story of a young couple who hadn't been married long. She was a true beauty, until an automobile accident left her face disfigured. After one of the many operations which followed, her husband was preparing to go in to see his wife.

The doctor warned him, “We had to sever a nerve in one part of her face. Her smile will never be the same. It will always be disfigured.”

Dr. Brand said the man walked in to see his wife and bent down to kiss her. And he said it was a simple yet powerful display of love—he noticed the man wrinkled up his face so that his lips matched hers. He accepted her just the way she was.

That's the good news about our body—God accepts us and loves us just the way we are. Young people—students—so many in our culture put themselves down because they don't look like some air brushed model in a magazine.

Please—the God of the universe, the God who made this incredible world in which we live, that God who sent his son all the way to a cross for each of us because he loves us, this very same God made you just the way you are—unique and special. And he even paid an enormous price just for you.

But Paul says there's more. **NOT ONLY DID GOD MAKE US, BUT HE LIVES IN US.** “Your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit,” he says in verse 19. Now remember, the Temple in the

Bible is the place where God lived. And if our body is a Temple for the Holy Spirit, then I guess that means we're Spirit-filled. Have you ever heard that term before? It always bothers me when Christian groups try to take certain phrases and apply them just to their own specific group.

We did that a number of years ago with "born again." Some would have us believe there are Christians and then there are "born again" Christians—somehow they're a notch higher than the rest. The Scriptures don't teach that. If you are a Christian, then you are a born again Christian.

And likewise, if you are a Christian, then you are a Spirit-filled Christian. The Holy Spirit lives within you.

And, Paul suggests in this passage that God cares about how we treat our bodies. God lives there, and he cares!

But he cares not because he's this harsh, oppressive person who wants to make us feel guilty all the time. And he cares not because he wants us to meet some false sense of what the world calls beautiful. He cares because he loves us and genuinely wants the best for us.

And he wants us to care—to care even about these physical bodies. And so we need to take care of them—we need to eat right and exercise and go the doctor. It's a stewardship issue. God owns our bodies, and he wants us to take care of them.

God cares about our view of the human body—he cares about how we treat our own bodies.

Sometimes we laugh about how strict the Mormons are with their dietary laws and rules. No alcohol—no caffeine—no tobacco. We're not nearly so legalistic—we're much more open-minded. But then we read that Utah, with its significant Mormon population, is the healthiest state in the country. They have the longest life expectancy in the nation. Maybe we could learn something from them.

I get tired of hearing people say, "It's my own personal choice. We're two consenting adults. What I want to do is my choice. It doesn't affect anyone else."

But Paul is clear. "You are not your own," he says. "You were bought with a price."

And so, when we treat sex as just a physical act, when we abuse our bodies with drugs or over-indulge in alcohol, when we live recklessly, it's not just a personal choice. There is a sense in which we hurt God himself.

God genuinely cares about how we treat ourselves physically. He intended for sex to be the ultimate form of communication within the bounds of a committed marriage, and when our society has lost its regard for the physical world, when we've broken down the God-given rules—we've paid a price. And the price we pay for the cheapening of sex is going to come back to haunt us in broken relationships and families that are torn apart by a lack of trust.

God has rules and expectations, not because he is a mean oppressive God who wants to take all the fun out of life, but for exactly the opposite reason. God cares about us, and wants us to care as well, because he wants us to enjoy this world and this life to the fullest.

But there is even more here. These words aren't directed to any one person individually. There is a universal theme to all this. God cares about you, yes—but he cares about the whole world as well.

GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF OTHER PEOPLE. We've always known as a denomination that we can't just pray for hungry people, we need to feed them as well.

God showed his ultimate concern for his physical world when he was born into the world as a tiny baby—real human flesh and blood. God incarnate—God in the flesh.

God cares about and loves this physical world. And he intends to accomplish his work through the work of people like you and me. He could just wave his hand and feed hungry people, but instead he has chosen to do his work through the physical efforts of his people.

Shortly after World War II, Christians in England were at work restoring and rebuilding churches destroyed by the German bombings. At one church there had been a large statue of Christ with outstretched arms which read, "Come unto me."

The statue had been destroyed, but the workers were able to restore most of it. The statue was left with no hands—they had been destroyed beyond repair.

After some debate, the statue was put back in place without the hands—but a new inscription was added: "Christ has no hands but ours."

God cares about this physical world—and wants us to care as well. He wants us to share from our abundance to feed hungry people—to bring medical supplies to remote villages—to find shelter for those cast off by society. We need to pray for and support those who day after day serve as caretakers, helping out on hospital floors and in assisted living homes. We need to keep our EMT's and paramedics and fire fighters and police officers in our prayers. We need to remember those who care for the physical needs of others.

God cares ... and he wants us to care as well. But wait. There's one more thing. One more word of good news—perhaps the best news of all.

THIS BODY—FLAWED AND BROKEN—IS NOT THE FINAL WORD. The Scriptures promise that God has a heavenly body awaiting us all. Paul says in verse 14, speaking of the body, "And God raised the Lord, and will also raise us up by his power."

Now I don't know the specifics of what heaven will be like. I don't know all the details. But I do know this—the Scriptures are clear: When we get to heaven, we won't just be a mass of spiritual, cosmic matter.

In heaven, you'll be you. And I'll be me. The Scriptures are clear: Heaven is a place where God will heal the wounds—the lame will walk—the deaf will hear—the blind will see—the cancer will be gone—the scars will be removed. One day God will take this body, diseased and broken though it may be, and make it whole.

God cares. He is the Lord even of our physical existence. He cares about this physical body. He made us. And he even bought us for a great price.

Four things I want us to remember. He loves us and accepts us just the way we are, but he does want us to take care of this Temple in which he lives. He wants us to treat each other and treat ourselves with respect and dignity. And one day he'll take this body and make it whole.

Just like Mr. Rogers, he looks at each one of us—different sizes—different shapes—all unique people—and he says, "I've always wanted to have a friend just like you."

So hold your head high. God accepts us ... and I pray we'll accept ourselves and care for ourselves as well. AMEN.