

For a **change of pace** ,

- And I know how you love change
- NOT
- I want to focus on **Paul's letter** to the.

And **let me begin** by making **an admission**:

There was a **long period** in my life

- When I used to **politely roll my eyes** at **St. Paul**
- Think me horrible?

My **uninformed gripe** was this:

***Paul was prudish in his thinking***

He is always **putting things off limits**

I **silently opined**

- That **Paul was different from Jesus** this way.
- Jesus was **never shocked by anything**

***2. Paul was not realistic***

- Doesn't he understand **that banning things**
- Is a **sure fire invitation**
- **For some** to want to do them

***3. Paul seemed to hate bodies***

- And **all** that we do **in them**

It was **Paul, I thought**

- Who **introduced finger shaking** to **Christianity**

And it's true, isn't it?

- Don't we **tend to think** of **God**
- As the **antithesis** of the **flesh?**

**Carnal** is what we are when we

- Are **farthest** from **heavenly**, right?

**Godly** is what we are when we are **spiritual**,

- When we **rise** above **worldly decadence**
- And **you know** kind of..... **float upward.**

Paul **seemed to be** talking **all the time**

- Of these **dual natures** –
- It's the "**flesh**" **versus** the "**spiritual.**"
- They're **opposed** to **one another, right?**

We **are taught** that in:

- **Practicing** the **right spiritual disciplines**
- **Thinking** the **correct thoughts**
- That we **might climb** out of
- The **muck and mire** of the **carnal** toward
- That **higher, spiritual realm?**

This is a **major** reason **why** people **come to church**.

- We want to be **less jerked around**
- By the **physical. Yes?**

But **when we come to church**, saying,

- “I want to **get spiritual,**”

The **church**, in **her wisdom** says,

- “**Let’s do Eucharist. Have some bread.**”

And while **you are at it**

- Use your **body to:**
- **Sing** some **songs**
- Look at **the beauty**
- **Greet each other** with **hugs and handshakes**

**Could it be...**

- That God came ***not just***
- To **deliver us** from **our flesh**
- And all that **flesh demands,**
- But to **redeem us *in our flesh.***

**Could it be...**

- That **fulfillment** comes then,
- **Not** in trying to **shed** our **humanity**
- So that we might, you know ... **float up to God,**

- But in meeting God **where we live.**

God has done the **impossible.**

- God has made our flesh **a living sacrament,**
- A **means** of his **grace.**

When was the **last time**

- You **thought of your body** as a **sacrament?**

C.S. Lewis said **it perfectly:**

- **“God likes matter; he invented it.”**

So today when we look at Paul’s **letter to the Corinthians,**

- And his talk about **physical matters,**
- We need **to pay attention**

**Now,** here’s my **epiphany about Paul:**

- **Yes,** Paul talks **candidly** here about **sex**
- But he’s **also speaking** to **what it means**
- To be an **inhabitor** of a body,
- About actually **“glorifying Christ in our bodies.”**

Paul is **practical.** He brings up

- The **physical aspect** of **our existence**
- Because that is **where we spend** our **earthly lives;**

- **Not** as **disembodied** souls,
- But as the **caretakers'**
- The **very body** we've **been given**.

Already today, in **rising** from **our sleep**,

- In **showering, dressing, eating**,
- We have **been mostly concerned** with the **physical**.

**But now**, at church,

- We're all **ready** to get **spiritual, right?**

But **here is Paul turning us back** to **the physical**,

- Which, **truth** be told, we'd rather **not talk about**.

This I know:

- Paul was not some **prudish puritanical person**
- Who thought that we could **wipe** out **sexual desire**
- **By** putting our **wretched flesh** in **chains**.

God has no **quarrel** with **pleasure** or **delight**.

**Please hear me:**

- **This is not just** a **rant** against **hedonism**.

And there is **perhaps** no **worse advertisement**

- For **our faith** than **some hypocritical Christian**

- **Extolling** the **ravages** of **sinful pleasure**
- **Only to be found** out as **partaker**
- Of that very pleasure.

And please **do not make the mistake** of thinking

- That Paul is **only talking** about,
- **You know**, those... “**bad**” people
- Those people who **are of the “flesh”**

**God’s goodness** is not some **disembodied** ideal

- That exists **only** in our minds,
- Something that **we can know**
- Only **spiritually** or **intellectually**.

That the **fullness of God’s love** for us

- Can be **experienced**
- In **touching**, in **seeing**, in **hearing**, in **moving**.

Paul was **primarily concerned**

- With **growing Jesus’ message**
- Of **love and reconciliation**.

Paul is making **the astounding claim**

- That we should **not do certain things**

- Because **our bodies** are **intimately connected**
- With **Christ's body-**
- **Ours** are the very **arms, hands, and feet** of **Christ**.

**Truth** be told:

- You **might even say** that Paul
- Has very **high view** of the body.

Now, I think it **safe to say**

- All of us have **abused our bodies**
- In **some way** or another,
- Either through **overindulgence** or **neglect**.

And not to **sluff this trend off**

- On to **the society** we live in,
- But the **environment** in which
- We find **ourselves immersed,**
- Sure **doesn't help**.

We live in a **media driven world,**

- And we **might say** that we **aren't affected**
- But don't, for a second, **believe that's true**.

Let me explain:

On **one hand,**

- We are told that our bodies are **purely** for **pleasure-**
- That **sex, food, alcohol,** and **all of the things**
- That bring us **momentary pleasure** are what
- We are **living** for,
- i.e. **beer** commercials, **cigarette** adds, **lingerie spots,** etc.

But this **pleasure complex** is not the **only one operating.**

- There is also **another strain** of thought,
- From **a bygone era** that is **alive as well.**

One might call it a **“puritanical” strain**

- That says we **must abstain** from **pleasure.**

This **life-view** holds that

- If we are **not depriving ourselves**
- And **pushing down** our **desires**
- We are **bad people.**

Let’s look at these **extremes,**

- **For** they are **yanking** us in **opposite directions.**

My take is that

This is why **we love**

- To read **gossipy magazines**
- You **know the ones....**

Those **glossy, quasi-news publications**

- About the **excesses** of the **rich** and **famous**,

The allure of **these publications**

- Is that **when looking at them**
- We get to **simultaneously**
- **Be titillated** by the **celebrities alleged activities**

While, **at the same time**,

- **Having the pleasure** of **passing judgment**
- On what we consider, their **imorality**.

We are country **that is**

- At the **same time**, both **libertine and puritanical**;

**A country** that **spawned**

- **Hugh Hefner** and **Larry Flynt right** along
- With **Jerry Falwell** and **Jimmy Swaggert**.

This kind of **cultural schizophrenia**

- Is hard to live with,
- For **which one is it?**

It's **neither**. Don't **make the mistake I did**

- And **bring Paul** into that craziness.

God **has sanctified**

- That **body of yours,**
- That it might be a source
- Of **great wisdom** and **great joy.**

So may you live today

- Into **the sacrament of your own body**
- **Your own flesh.**

**Amen.**