

Nervy nervy nervy St. Paul. It's not that he went to ancient Sparta to rail against militarism. Or to Wall St. to condemn greed. He went to the Las Vegas of the Roman empire --- swinging two-ported sailor-overrun Corinth, rife with prostitution, fornication, adultery, licentiousness, incest, sodomy --- that's the short list --- and preaches about purity, sex limited to marriage, and bodily holiness.

It's not that the ancient Greeks loved the human body and St. Paul didn't. It's exactly the opposite. Greeks liked perfect bodies, with perfect proportions --- the way some US people do --- but didn't care much for normal bodies, like yours or mine. The body was just sort of as tomb for your soul. The body is a tomb, Epictetus had said. I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse.

If you believe that, you either humiliate, diminish and control your bodily instincts and desires. Or you choose the Corinthian option. Since the body makes no difference, let yourself go till every appetite and whim is satisfied. (Does this sound familiar?)

A Corinthian, from that time or today, stands and says: Paul of Tarsus, my body is sexual and it has its urges and needs. The way I satisfy them has no moral connotation. What I do with my private life is of no concern to anyone else and doesn't affect my soul.

And Paul answers: Everything a person does affects their soul. And if your sexuality never focuses in a committed way, something about your soul isn't focused. Your soul, not just your body, stays childish, impulsive, undirected. And what you do with your body is of deep concern to God. Your body is the home of God's Spirit. Your body is the outer expression of your soul. It's wonderful Love your body. Respect and care for it.

Fiddle-dee-dee, retorts the Corinthian. What I do in Vegas stays in Vegas.

Fiddle-dee-dee, yourself, replies Paul. Who you did something with may stay in Vegas, but the you that was unfaithful or untruthful ... that same damaged you got in the plane and returned home to be part of your family, your town, your church.

But, pleads the Corinthian, isn't this my body? Can't I do what I want with my body?

And St. Paul replies, warmly: This will be counter-intuitive for you ... but it's not your time, your talent, your treasure ... and it's not your body. Your body belongs to God, and your body is part of the mystical body of Christ the church. When you injure your body, you injure Christ and the church. If you can't love and respect your body because it belongs to you, then love and respect your body because it belongs to God.

To close. We have some hard teachings from St. Paul ... given not out of hatred for the body but love for it, not to stymie human self-expression but to stimulate it. Jesus saved us by the sacrificial holiness of his own body. St. Paul tells us our bodies our temples now of his Spirit. His voice ringing in the Church wakes us up.