

Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day 2010

Resource Packet

God's Holy Temple: To Protect and Respect

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Dear Church Leaders:

Joyful greetings to each of you. As you prepare for another Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day, I would like you to spend some time meditating on the following verses from Paul and what these verses mean to you. Paul writes, “do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.

When you think of your body do you believe it is God’s temple? Do you believe that all women and men are claimed as God’s dwelling place if we permit Him? If our body is the place where the King of Kings wants to dwell then we must be precious in His eyes. And if we are precious in His eyes then we must do all we can to prevent anyone from desecrating this body – not only our bodies, but those of our sisters in other parts of this world. How can we do this? We can speak out on the many atrocities that are perpetrated on our sisters around the world: things like Female Genital Mutilation and Early Childhood Marriages.

So as you make your plans for Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day, plan with much prayer and thought of what our sisters in the church, the community, and around the world are facing each day. Let us intercede on their behalf each day and ask God to use us to touch some life for Him. A touch of healing and blessing. Let us make this year a year that will make a difference in the lives of many women and girls who are suffering from violence and abuse.

Thank you.

With love and joy,

Heather-Dawn Small
GC Women’s Ministries Director.

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About the Author:

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Lourdes and her husband, Reynir, have one married daughter, Carmen, who is an occupational therapist. Lourdes enjoys singing, playing the guitar and piano, and traveling.

TAKING OUT THE TRASH
Children's Story
Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day 2010

(Illustration: child holding a smelly trash bag)

Bible Text: "You should know that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in you . . . So honor God with your bodies" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, ICB).

"That should do it," Dad announced with a tired smile. "Our garage is now officially cleaned out!"

"We did a great job, didn't we?" I stated proudly. "But, Dad, what are we going to do with all this junk? We've got boxes of old, broken tools, empty oil cans, a sled with one runner, and a rusted basketball hoop. Then there are those smelly garbage bags filled with dirty rags."

Dad thought for a moment, then nodded. "I know. Let's dump everything in our church sanctuary. It should fit nicely between the Communion table and the organ."

"Our church!" I gasped. "We can't do that!"

"Why?"

"Because the church is . . . is . . . God's house," I cried. "It's His temple!"

"You mean, like your body is His temple?"

"Yes. Just like—" I stopped, my mouth hanging open. "Oh, I get it," I said shyly. "You're talking about all that junk food I eat. My body is God's temple and I shouldn't be putting such unhealthy garbage into it, right?"

Dad nodded. "Christians should be different from those who don't know God," he said. "We should eat different, sound different, act different, and even entertain ourselves different. God wants to live in our hearts, just as He wants to live in our church."

I glanced over at the trash and imagined how awful it would look piled beside the Communion table. Then I imagined my body filled with sugary and greasy junk food. Grabbing a garbage bag I grinned. "Let's take all of this to the dump where it belongs." And we did.

Yes, Jesus wants us to live and act lovingly as His follower. Remember Dorcas of Joppa? She was a real Christian woman who was always doing good and helping poor people (Acts 9:36). Naomi loved and treated her daughter-in-law Ruth kindly even though she was not a follower of Jesus. Her loving behavior helped Ruth to decide to accept Naomi's God.

Check it Out!

- Being a follower of Jesus, Christians should adopt a different lifestyle. We want to think, feel, and act in a way that honor God and to live as Jesus would live.
- Christians practice good health habits for we are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We need exercise and rest, a healthful diet and avoid alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics that are harmful to the body.
- We are to apply high standards in choosing good music, books, television programs, movies, and other kinds of recreation so as to help us grow as true followers of Jesus (Philippians 4:8).

Brain Game!

- If Jesus lives in your heart, how should you treat friends who are unkind to you? What about friends of a different color?
- What advice will you give your friends at church about the kinds of books they read, music they listen to, and films they watch?

Try It Out!

- Keep a supply of fresh fruit around the house so when you're tempted to eat junk food, you can satisfy your hunger with health-building apples, oranges, or grapes.

God's Holy Temple: To Protect and Respect
Sermon
By Lourdes E. Morales-Gudmundsson

Introduction

On this special Sabbath that we dedicate to women around the world, I would invite us to consider this question: In the Bible, what attitude toward the human body do we find? Not how do we see it, with all our preconceptions—the images of pencil-thin models, musclemen, voluptuous Playboy bunnies, or plump matrons hurtling from Weightwatchers to a “nothing but kumquats” diet—but as God sees these body-temples of ours.

Have you ever walked into one of the great cathedrals of the world? In its dim interior, you didn't say a word; you were overwhelmed by the majesty of its sweeping columns, its soaring ceilings, the breathtaking beauty of the altar, the solemn hush. You walked slowly, quietly, not wanting to disturb this holy place.

Have you ever thought that this is the same reverence God asks you to have for your body, the temple of the Holy Spirit? Have you thought that this same care in “treading softly” should also be the way we treat other people's bodies, because they, too, are holy, the temple of the Spirit of God? Yes! Our decisions about what we eat, what we drink, and how we use and treat our bodies we must view as sacred. Sacred because our bodies, yours and mine, are holy. When Paul talks to the Corinthian Christians about how they were to treat one another's bodies, he concludes: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (I Cor. 10:31).

I. The Principle: We are “The temple”

Although in I Cor. 3:16 Paul was referring to sexual immorality, the principle behind this statement applies to any violation or mutilation of the human body. He says, “Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple” (I Cor. 3:16-17). The Greek word translated “temple” here comes from a root word meaning *to dwell* and is related to the Greek word meaning “a sacred place.” In I Cor. 6, after exhorting the Corinthians to sexual purity and against all forms of fornication, Paul poses another question: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” Paul could have used the Greek word for “temple” that refers to the actual temple building. But he chose to use the word that refers to the most sacred area of the temple, that housed the Most Holy Place, where God chose to dwell. Then he makes it clear to whom our bodies belong: “For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (I Cor. 6:19-20). Our bodies belong to God

who bought them through the blood of Jesus Christ. This clearly places a high value on the human body and invites us to hold it in high esteem.

II. The Reality

What is happening to the bodies of women and girls around the globe cannot bring glory to God's name and, therefore, must be of concern to Christians everywhere. In their book *Half the Sky*, its title taken from the Chinese proverb "Women hold up half the sky," Nicolas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn describe the realities of the lives of women and teenage girls around the world. The bodies of some are exchanged for money. Others whose bodies are not yet able to bear children are forced to give birth, often dying in the process. Many who survive endure a living death with diseases that make them social outcasts.

Other women and girls are sacrificed on a fiendish altar called "family honor." At times, family honor may be a good thing, but the enemy of souls has made it a means of destroying bodies and lives in the name of reputation.

Jesus came to release women and girls from the bondage of social custom and give them a place of honor in the kingdom of heaven. He healed Peter's mother-in-law, thereby forever honoring mothers, whether by marriage or by birth; and He took the time to talk to a prostitute of an enemy tribe, a hated Samaritan, and reveal Himself to her as the Messiah.

Jesus went out of His way to empower the powerless and give honor to those shamed by social, political, economic, or religious restrictions. It must matter to Christians that the enemy is hard at work destroying lives here and around the globe through violence against women and girls. Jesus came to change all that, and we, as His followers, must find specific, effective ways to follow His example. We must examine our own attitudes, as well as the problems in our community. We must ask ourselves, "What am I doing to help protect teenage girls in my church?" "What am I, by my unconcern, allowing to go on in my town?" "Am I acting like Christ?"

It is important also to consider the sources of my attitudes. Negative customs and attitudes about women have been codified in the laws of many cultures. One woman's experience illustrates how the law discriminates. Tribal laws in her native country carried more weight in her village than even the laws of the land. This woman was the victim of gang rape for a crime of which her brother had been falsely accused. According to tribal law, a woman who was raped was expected to commit suicide, since she had not only been shamed, but had brought dishonor on her entire family.

This woman knew that none of what had happened had anything to do with her or her brother or her family—they had all been victims of the jealous rage of an enemy tribe. Even though in her tribe no woman had ever demanded justice for

such a crime against her body and her family, she determined to end such injustices. It took her several years and much cutting through bureaucratic red tape, as she lived with the added shame of attempting something no woman in her community had done before—something her culture believed no woman should do. But she valued herself as a God-fearing woman and believed that God was on the side of right. Eventually she won the case against the enemy tribe, succeeded in having her attackers sentenced to prison for life, and convinced the government to subsidize a school for girls in her region.

III. Response

Too often Christians adopt the social and political attitudes of their society rather than building a strong biblical foundation which recognizes how much God values every person. Are tradition and custom more sacred than our Lord's call to love and care for one another, even to the point of loving one's enemies? How can we hurt another person in any way while claiming to be Christians? If Jesus focused the benefits of the kingdom of heaven on those most vulnerable in society, we as Christians can do no less.

The United Nations speaks as a body against injustices or practices that endanger groups worldwide. This organization has declared February 6 as International Day against Female Genital Mutilation. It is estimated that "120 to 140 million women have been subjected to the practice and 3 million girls continue to be at risk each year."¹ Thanks to rising awareness through education and governmental commitments, the practice is slowly being abandoned in such countries as Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, and Nigeria. Even so, the practice continues, and with millions of girls at risk, the Christian church bears a moral responsibility to call governments, communities, and individuals to rise to the biblical standard of the high value God places on the human body, the temple of the Holy Spirit and purchase of Jesus Christ.

IV. The Evidence

What evidence do we have that God wanted to raise and restore woman to her rightful position? God chose the "sacred place" of a woman's womb to create and form the human body of the Savior of all humankind. He came to a teenage peasant girl called Mary and announced to her that her body would become the place of gestation and nurture for the very Son of God. In this act of scandal and mystery, God forever raised woman's body from shame to honor, from humiliation to respect. Mary's song praises God precisely because, in choosing her to bear the Son of God, He had forever changed the order of society where women were disdained, and the proud were honored: "My soul magnifies the Lord...for He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant....He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:47,48, 51-52).

The Bible provides another restoration story, that of a woman who had a disease that made her a social outcast. She was a woman who had spent her last penny on doctors who could not heal her mysterious bleeding. According to levitical law (Lev. 15:25-30), any woman who bled beyond one week would be considered ritually unclean. Imagine! This woman had been bleeding for 12 years! And her community, instead of extending a hand of compassion toward this suffering child of God, condemned her to a life of isolation. In this she is much like the teenage girls in many countries today whose bodies have been violated, whether legally or illegally, and who are left to suffer the consequences of disease isolated, alone, the outcasts of society.

But notice what happens to the woman in this Bible story. Hearing that Jesus is in town, she thinks to herself, "I know I'm not supposed to come out on the street or let anyone touch me, but perhaps, if I join the crowd, no one will notice me. I'll just touch the border of his outer garment and that will heal me." Thus she reasoned in faith and desperation. She could not wait for help from human beings; she must go directly to God. She truly believed Jesus was the Son of God and that He was her only hope.

Stooping, she creeps into the crowd that presses around Jesus. There He was! She could see Him now. Perhaps she remembered that men were not supposed to even speak to women in public, less touch one. But in her faith and need she ignored these old restrictions—she would touch Jesus' outer garment and she *would be healed!* Closer and closer she creeps until she reaches out and touches His cloak. Suddenly Jesus turns around, asking, "Who touched Me?"

Then comes the best part. Jesus addresses the woman directly and in public! Now that everyone knows what has happened, she comes to Jesus trembling, afraid that He, too, will turn her away. She speaks fast, telling Jesus of her suffering. Perhaps she is afraid He'll ridicule her in front of all those people, but when He opens His mouth, the words are gentle: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease." No humiliations, no reprimands, no looks of disgust, just an affirmation of her faith and of her personhood as a "daughter" of Almighty God. She is a person of value.

We learn yet more from the story of Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who, shortly before the crucifixion, bathed Jesus' feet with the finest, most expensive perfumes and then wiped them with her hair (John 12:3). In those days this was considered shocking! And in broad daylight! But here in the presence of powerful men, Jesus honors a woman whose body had become the playground of many of those very men who were incensed at her public display of holy affection. They were shocked precisely because they could not tell the difference between holy and unholy affection. From a human perspective, Mary should have been rebuked by Jesus, and yet He chose to reprimand, not the woman, but His disciple Judas who complained that the money spent should have been given to the poor.

Ellen White dedicates a whole chapter in *The Desire of Ages* to this public act performed for Jesus by a woman. Mrs. White points out that this simple yet courageous act was to disturb the consciences of the disciples after the crucifixion. She says, “*They felt the reproof keenly as they took from the cross the bruised body of their Lord*” (DA 565). They reproached themselves for not understanding what Mary had so clearly understood: that Jesus was indeed the very Son of God in human flesh, and that it was only through Him that she, or anyone, could have hope of salvation.

An earlier incident with Mary reveals yet another dimension of woman’s value in the sight of God. Jesus not only elevates women to new heights, but He honors and respects her capacity to use her God-given mental powers to learn. Jesus is visiting in Bethany at the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. While waiting for the meal to be prepared, Mary sits at Jesus’ feet, assuming the role of a disciple—a role, in that society, reserved solely for men. When Martha comes to Jesus to complain that Mary is out of place sitting at His feet like a student instead of helping her in the kitchen, Jesus rebukes her, saying that Mary has chosen the better part “which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

What did He mean by that remark? In Luke we’re told that Martha was overly “burdened” or “distracted” (Luke 10:39-40) by the preparations she was making in the kitchen for her guest. Here the implication is that when it comes to her duties in the home and her duty to God, in the changed order of things that Jesus is restoring, woman’s duty to her Creator must always come first. Jesus, once again, is breaking the stranglehold of socially assigned “woman’s place” to raise her to the place God has assigned her. A woman has a body and a mind that, like the man’s, must first be dedicated to the service of God and then to earthly matters. This is what Jesus shows in all these encounters. Understanding this, one can understand Paul’s statement that in Christ, there is no male or female (Gal. 3:28), since their baptism into Christ makes them equal in Christ.

V. Conclusion

The lesson from Jesus’ encounters with women whose bodies and brains were disdained and abused is that those who receive Jesus Christ *must* honor and respect women. In fact, the sign that one has received Christ in the life is the manner in which one treats women and all who are commonly without power in their societies around the world.

When Paul asks husbands and wives to be subject to one another “out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21), he’s raising the bar for Christian relationships between male and female, both inside and outside the marriage bond. Respect, kindness, generosity, consideration, love—these are some among the many holy traits that should be cultivated by every believer, not only when others are

looking, but in the privacy of the home where only angels and the Holy Spirit give witness.

The Psalmist assures us that God remembers that we are dust (Ps. 103: 14) and that we easily fall prey to the fear, selfishness, hard-heartedness, and pride that lead to abuse in any of its forms. Yet our Lord stands at the door and knocks: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me" (Rev. 3: 20).

This is a promise of forgiveness. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin by casting His mantle of forgiveness over us. Once forgiven, we are invited to dedicate every part of our body and mind to His service as a daily act of gratitude for the sacrifice made for us by the Son of God.

VI. Appeal

May the "renewal of our minds" create new and wholesome ways of relating to one another in Christ, honoring body, soul, and spirit as a gift we give to one another because we recognize the value God places on every person.

(Optional Appeal)

It was a dark and stormy night when a lady was on a boat crossing Lake Michigan. The lightning, thunder, and rain made her very nervous. She saw jagged rocks jutting above the surface of the lake. In fear, she asked the captain, "Do you know where all the rocks are out there in the lake?" "No," the captain replied, "I don't, but I do know where it's safe."

As you "sail" through life, you are going to see lots of "rocks" out there. Some you will know how to avoid, others will come upon you as a surprise. The important thing to know is "where it's safe." Jesus knows the safe way to live a life and honor Him with body, mind and soul.

Today invite you to find a place to respond to the Lord this morning and make your move to where God wants you to do.

Prayer

Gracious God, we come before you with thanksgiving. We know you are a God who is able. But today we come before you with heavy hearts. We will not longer pretend ignorance of the abuses perpetrated against women. Help us determine to help end violence against women. We ask you to give us the wisdom and the courage to end abuse in our church and in our community. May we remember the immense value you, our Creator and Redeemer, place on each one of us, and may we reflect your love to one another.

Give us knowledge, wisdom, strength, and understanding. These are the mercies we ask in Jesus name, Amen.

Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

¹(Statement on the International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation, 06 February 2007, Message of Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA, <http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=927>)

God, the Source of Our Hope

Reader 1: For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:4, 13 NIV)

Reader 2: We hear the words – joy, peace, hope. They are beautiful to our ears. But, what do they mean to women whose lives are filled with pain and desperation, women whose sons and daughters are victims of violence and wars? How can we have hope when for many women every day is dark with worry and despair?

Reader 3: As long as one of us is hungry and homeless, we are all hungry and homeless. As long as one of us is uprooted from our homeland, forced to dwell in temporary tents and shacks, we are all uprooted. As long as one of us is a victim of earthquakes, floods, wars, we are all victims. How do we speak to one another the words of hope?

Reader 1: Hear again words from the Scriptures: Hope returns when we remember this one thing: the Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue, fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise. The Lord is all we have, and so in Him we must put our hope. (Lamentations 3:19-24, Good News Bible)

Reader 2: God, our source of hope, give us grace and courage to overcome barriers, to bear one another's burdens, to claim hope for the abused as well as the abuser, to work together so that no one is hungry, to open the doors of opportunity to women around the world.

Reader 3: Inspire us to sing together songs of praise, surrendering to You, Father, rather than to circumstances.

Reader 1: Hear again the words of the Psalmist: How I love to do your will, my God. I keep your teachings in my heart. I tell the good news that you save us. I always speak of your faithfulness and help. (Psalm 40:8-10, Good News Bible)

Reader 2: We claim our common desire for a message of hope. We are all voices of women in need of acceptance, love, and affirmation. We are voices for lost and hurting people.

Reader 3: Yes, regardless of our age, we are called to be messengers of hope, standing alongside one another, meeting one another's needs wherever we find them, telling each other about the One who alone brings everlasting joy and hope.

Reader 1: For everything that was written in the past was written...that we might have hope (Romans 15:40). Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God. (Psalm 42:11, NRSV)

Reader 3: We know, Lord, that you are the Creator of heaven and earth. You are the God of hope, so who in the world caused this grief? How did this happen?”

Reader 2: Here’s the answer: This has happened over the generations, through disobedience to God’s law and rejection of His love, passed down through culture and tradition, and it’s up to us, who know Him as our Savior, who value freedom for all, to encourage and foster hope in the oppressed and dejected. *This* is the Christian woman’s call, and joy: to share this hope and to pray for the restoration that will come on that great day when *every* woman, man and child will know the glorious grace and goodness of our Savior!

Reader 1: The words of Scripture come alive as we evidence them in our eyes, our hands, our prayers, and our deeds. We put our hope in you, Lord. (Psalm 71:5, Good News Bible)