My Body, My Slave

(by Rick Liggin)

In talking to the Corinthian Christians about the importance of self-discipline, the apostle Paul said: ***“I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified”*** (**1 Corinthians 9:27**). When I read this text, the words *“buffet my body and make it my slave”* [NASB] grab my attention. This expression suggests a distinction between my body and the real me. Obviously, my body is not the real me. It is only the outer physical shell that houses the real me.

This fact is confirmed in other Bible texts, like Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians (**4:16-18**; **5:1-9**). Here Paul tells us that the *“outer man”* (our mortal body) is decaying day by day, while the *“inner man”* (the real me) is constantly being renewed (**4:16**). This *“outer man,”* Paul says, is only an earthly tent that houses the real me (**5:1-4**). We note this distinction because of what Paul said about controlling our bodies. The real me must control my body, even if I must *“buffet”* it to get the job done (**9:27**)! To *“buffet”* a person literally is to give him a black eye [Zerwick]; it is to treat him roughly. Metaphorically, it essentially means what we mean today when we speak of *“whipping ourselves into shape.”*

Our text tells us what Paul did to ensure his salvation; and it suggests what we must do as well! We need to *“whip our bodies into shape”* and make them our slaves, a slave of the real me, the inner, spiritual me! If I’m serious about my own salvation, I need to exercise some rigid self-discipline over my body, and I need to do it no matter how bad it hurts. I must make my body *“my slave”*! I have to let my body know just who in this relationship is going to control wholly; who the real boss is going to be! And folks, it must be me! I must not allow my body to dictate to me! I must dictate to my body!

Unfortunately, too many of us have this exactly backward! We let our bodies control us! Instead of telling our body what it must do, we let the body tell us what to do! Instead of making *“my body my slave,”* we let our body make us its slave! Instead of controlling the flesh, we indulge the flesh! Let me tell you: the man who *“vents all his feelings”* or *“always speaks his mind”* – that man is letting his body rule him (**Proverbs 29:11**). The guy who gets angry or gets his feelings hurt every time someone looks at him cross ways – that guy’s body has made him its slave! The person who says, *“I couldn’t help it! It felt so good, I just couldn’t help myself”* – again, that man is one whose body (passion) has taken control of him! In fact, anyone who *“can’t stop it”* or *“can’t control it”* is really just allowing his own body to enslave and rule over him.

*“Well, it’s my body! I’ll do with it what I want to!”* Not if you are a Christian, it’s not! If you are a Christian, your body now belongs to God! ***“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body”*** (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**).

Now that we are Christians, we are ***“under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh,”*** but to God, to live as He wants (**Romans 8:12**). And if it’s now God’s will that we must do, then we’re going to have to stop indulging the flesh and start making our bodies our slaves even if that means we will have to do some serious body buffeting to get it under control!

How serious are you about making sure that you’re not somehow disqualified from receiving the incorruptible crown of life (**1 Corinthians 8:24-27**)? If you’re really serious about it, then you’d better take steps to get your body under control! Your body cannot control you unless you let it control you! Don’t do that! I know it might hurt, but buffet your body and make it your slave, lest possibly, after you have served others, you yourself should be disqualified!