

Your Body is Not Your Own

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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King Solomon wrote that there is “nothing new under the sun,” and that applies to sin just as much as it does to anything else. Corinth was a city that was given over to the worship of sex. The religious centre of the city was the temple of Aphrodite, whose thousand priestesses were essentially “ordained” prostitutes and the greatest show of worship that the people of the city could make to their goddess was to engage in sex with one of her priestesses. And God had brought the Gospel to that city through the ministry St. Paul, and as men and women came to Christ, their new faith challenged the sexual immorality of Corinth...or it should have.

St. Paul had made it clear to these people that what was going on in Corinth was wrong, but there were some people in the church who disagreed with him. In fact, they twisted Paul’s words about freedom in Christ to justify Christians continuing in their former live of sexual immorality. There’s nothing new under the sun. We have the same problem today. Some claim that the Bible doesn’t say what it really does say about sex. Some claim that to say that some things are wrong is to be guilty of legalism. I’ve heard people say, “Well, if I were doing something wrong the Holy Spirit would tell me...and he hasn’t,” as if the Holy Spirit hasn’t already told us in the Scriptures he caused to be written for us.

Look at chapter 6, beginning at verse 12. In these nine verses Paul deals with these arguments. Again, this is a problem that has to do with the Church’s witness to the world, but it also has to do with our own spiritual health and, as Paul will show us, with what it means to be a worshipper of God. He says in verse 12:

[You argue:]“**All things are lawful for me,**” but [I say,] **not all things are helpful.** [You say:] “**All things are lawful for me,**” but **I will not be enslaved by anything.**

Notice that in most of your translations “All things are lawful for me” is in quotation marks. This was one of Paul’s statements about our new life in Christ – about living in the *grace* of God. “All things are lawful for me” was Paul’s statement against legalism. It was something that other churches struggled with. Like the Pharisees, they reduced the faith to a list of do’s and don’ts. It’s not that the do’s and don’ts were wrong, but that these people saw their redemption as a matter of keeping the list. The Law given in the Old Testament was given to show us God’s holy standard and to show us that no human being can ever meet it. The Law was given to drive men and women to trust in the righteousness of someone else – to drive them to Jesus Christ, the only man who ever lived up to the Law’s standard. Our problem is that it’s easier to fall back on earning God’s favour by following the list of rules – and it makes us feel better about ourselves. That’s the problem of the legalist. But as I said before, the Corinthians had the *opposite* problem. When Paul said, “All things are lawful for me,” the Corinthians took it as an excuse to simply throw the idea of right and wrong out the window. They said, “I’m free in Christ. He paid for my sins. I no longer stand condemned. I’m gonna go have fun! After all, Paul said: ‘All things are lawful for me.’”

And so here Paul gives the first reason why sexual immorality is wrong from the Christian. He says, “No. You’re abusing what I told you. It’s true, you no longer stand condemned by the Law, but that doesn’t mean that the Law doesn’t have anything to say about what’s good for you.” It’s still valid in showing us the standard of our holy God. You were redeemed from the penalty of the Law so that you could live in freedom to fulfil it. He freed you from the mastery of sin, so that he could be your master – which is why he also says that while all things might be lawful, continuing in *anything* – even if that thing isn’t inherently sinful – if it makes you a slave to it instead of a servant of Jesus is not good either.

But notice what Paul *doesn’t* do here. He isn’t stepping in and saying that now that they’re Christians there’s another set of rules for them. That would be legalism again. He steps in and says, “Yes, you’re right, *but* truth stands in the balance.

When I was a kid one of my favourite things on the playground was the balancing beam. Pretty soon it just wasn’t a challenge to balance on something a few inches off the ground, so I’d climb the monkey bars or the swingset and walk along the bar at the top like it was a balancing beam. It was a stupid thing to do because I could have easily lost my balance and fallen off that narrow path. But I’m reminded of that narrow beam when I consider that Jesus described the Christian as “the straight and narrow way.” One of the problems inherent in walking a narrow path is that you can fall off. From the top of the swingset, it didn’t matter which side I fell off – either way it was bad. As Christians walking the narrow path of liberty and have a similar problem. C.S. Lewis was right when he said that Satan sends errors into the world in pairs of opposites. He doesn’t care which side we fall to, he just wants us to fall. He wants us to look down at one error and guard ourselves against it so much that we fall the other way and unwittingly fall into the opposite error.

So the Corinthians were avoiding the extreme of legalism on one side, but in avoiding it they had fallen off the other side into license without even realising it. Their response to the Law was to simply do whatever it was they wanted no matter what it was. The problem is that that’s not liberty. Paul reminds them: Just because you *can* do it, doesn’t mean that it’s a good thing to do.

Look at verse 13. Paul addresses their second argument.

[They said:] “**Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food**”— [but Paul said, Yes,] **and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.**

They figured: “Hey, sex is a physical appetite just like hunger. God gave me a stomach so that I can eat when I’m hungry and there’s nothing wrong with that, so why is it wrong to indulge my sexual appetites with a prostitute? In fact, if it would be wrong to starve myself of food, wouldn’t it be wrong to starve myself of sex?” Sound familiar? This is the same argument we hear today: “It’s just part of our animal instinct and it’s unhealthy to

say no to it – in fact if you tell a teenager ‘No,’ they won’t develop into healthy adults.”

Part of their problem was that they had bought into the Greek philosophy that said that soul was all that mattered – that when you died the body was forever destroyed while the soul lived on. They saw the body as just a temporary shell for the soul so it didn’t matter what you did with it. But St. Paul reminds them of the Resurrection. God isn’t going to annihilate our bodies – he’s going to perfect them. Just as he raised Christ to perfection, he’s going to raise us. “Yes,” he says, “God made food and the stomach for each other, but he set that up as a *temporary* arrangement. There will come a time when God will consummate our redemption and he’ll do away with these earthly bodies and we’ll be resurrected into a perfect body just like Jesus.”

We get tied up with the things of this world and we forget that God has bigger plans for us. He created us for union with himself. Because of our sin that union was broken, but through Christ God has restored it. Jesus talks about his relationship with us in John 14:20, describing it as “you in me, and I in you.” One of the most profound things we can realise and come to understand is that God created each of us to be *indwelt by himself*. And that’s what God does for us when we’re born again – when he gives us new life: Christ’s Spirit takes hold of us, fills us up, and unites us wholly with him. As Paul says, the body was made, not for destruction, but for the Lord – for that unity with Christ. He’s done that by giving us his Spirit to indwell us, but also promises to perfect that unity – to one day resurrect our bodies, that have been corrupted by sin and death, and unite us perfectly with himself. Just as he raised Jesus, he will raise us too. One day the mortal side of our existence will pass away – the need to eat, drink, go to the bathroom, sleep – but that will happen not because God is just going to do away with our bodies, it’s because he’s perfecting them and making them fit to be one with him.

And because of God’s bigger purpose, Paul says, “Your body was not made for sexual immorality – for union with a prostitute – but was made for the Lord.” He goes on in verse 15:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

Why is sexual immorality wrong for the Christian? Because sex unites two people together, not just physically, but spiritually. God gives us a *real* view of sex in Scripture. The world wants to see it as nothing more than an animal passion. But God shows us that there’s more to it than that. Paul takes us back to the Creation and to Eden where God brought Adam and Eve together and said that they would “become one flesh.” Animals mate with each other and move on. Humans were created to be spiritually united by sex. Once you have sex with somebody, your relationship with them is never the same again, no matter how much you pretend otherwise. But that’s how God made us and that’s why he tells us to limit sex to the context of marriage. Becoming one flesh with someone outside the husband-wife relationship only causes hurt and pain.

St. Paul emphasises the fact that sex makes two people one. He tells us that sexual immorality on the part of the Christian means taking the personal property of Jesus Christ and *uniting* it sexually and spiritually with another. And in the case of prostitution, actually paying for it. I wonder if the Corinthians had had this in mind if they would have been involved in this kind of immorality. Would you take Jesus to see a prostitute with you? But that’s what was happening. Any time we engage in sexual immorality, we’re joining not just ourselves to another, but Jesus too. And the word that Paul’s using here for sexual immorality is that word *porneia*. In the Greek world it usually just referred to prostitution, but it was used by Greek-speaking Jews to describe every sexual activity outside of marriage. And remember that Jesus said that we can be just as guilty of adultery in our minds as we can in our bodies. As Christians we belong to Christ. We bring him with us if we hire a prostitute, if we have an affair, if we engage in premarital

sex, if we engage in lustful looks, if we look at a Playboy, or if we surf porn on the Internet.

Can you see why Paul was horrified by this? Who would want to unite Jesus with a prostitute – involving the Lord of Glory in a grossly sinful act? And yet that’s what every act of sexual immorality is for the Christian. Again, going back to verse 13, he says:

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

And then in verse 17:

But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

The Lord is a Spirit, but he also created us as beings with a spiritual element. Becoming a Christian – being born again – is about the Holy Spirit fusing your spirit with himself. This is what St. Peter is talking about in his second epistle when he says we “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Think about that and think about how amazing it is. We can talk about all sorts of ways humans are different from animals, but here’s the biggest: we were created with the capacity to be united spiritually with our Creator.

And that’s the basis for the New Covenant in Scripture: the uniting of the believer with the Holy Spirit to give new life: our being united with the Holy Spirit so that we face every situation and circumstance with a new power and a new ability to resist sin and a new ability to understand and see things like we never saw them before. That’s why our lives change when we come to Christ and are born again by the Spirit of God. There’s an amazing inner transformation that takes place as the Holy Spirit takes our spirit and makes us one with Christ. We are one with Christ in the power of his Spirit and that’s why Paul says in verse 18:

Flee from sexual immorality.

People ask me how to overcome sexual sin. They tell me it’s hard to resist. Here’s St. Paul’s profound apostolic advice: Flee! Run away! Get away from it, no matter what it takes! The reason we find it hard to overcome sin is because we don’t flee.

We decided to sit next to it, to look at it, to play with it. If you're sitting in a parked car and start to get aroused, turn the ignition on and get out of there. If you're watching TV and something smutty gets your attention, turn it off or change the channel. If you can't keep yourself away from porn on the Internet, cut off your service or move the computer to place that's not private.

"Flee immorality" – that's the advice that Scripture gives everywhere. Don't play with it. Don't see how far you can go before falling into it. Flee. Run away. Temptation is often a subtle force, but the destruction it causes in people's lives is everywhere to see and ought to back up what Paul says: Flee. Run away. *Especially* from sexual immorality. He goes on:

Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Sexual sin falls into its own unique category. It's not the unforgivable sin by any means, but the damage it causes is more severe than most other things and its implication for our unity with Christ are severe. Paul goes on to explain what he means in verse 19:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

St. Paul takes them back to the temple metaphor they knew so well. The temple of Aphrodite was a temple because it housed a statue of the goddess and was devoted to her worship. And so Paul says to the Corinthian Christians: "*You* are a temple too! As a believer you have been united in spirit with God. God lives in you by his Spirit. In 12:13 he tells us that by the Holy Spirit we have all been baptised into the Body and that we have our new life as we drink of God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells us. He unites us to Christ. He makes us his temple. And what a temple! We don't just have a piece of carved stone somewhere inside us to worship. We have *God himself* inside us! That's what happens when you become a Christian – when the Spirit baptises you into the Body of Christ. It's not

something for later, not a "second work," not something you have to ask for or earn somehow – it's the very *essence* of *being* a Christian. Notice Paul isn't just addressing *some* Christians as temples of the Spirit. We're *all* temples indwelt by the Spirit, because it's *by* being baptised – immersed in and with and by – the Holy Spirit that, as Paul said in 12:13, we are made one with Christ in the first place.

And so Paul asks, "What are you doing with your body – with your temple?" It's supposed to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and devoted to the worship of God. And yet sexual sin opens the door of the temple and invites someone else in. It brings the body of that person who is the temple into a wrong union. By its very nature, sexual sin is a form of idolatry. It means kicking God off the temple's throne and replacing him with the one we sexually desire.

Idolatry defiles the temple. It is a wilful rejection of the very God who gives us new life by uniting our spirit to his Holy Spirit. And so sexual immorality ought to be of special concern for the Christian. Who sits on the throne in your life? Whom do you worship? Is your body God's temple? Is it dedicated to the Lord? To his worship and to his service?

Paul closes by taking us back to the cross – because that's what it's all about:

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

That's the basic truth of Christianity. Every one of us needs to remember this fact. None of us has a final right to himself or herself – only God has that right. He calls us to serve him and to follow him. We each need to ask: To whom do I belong? Friends, he bought us at the cross. And so he has the right to send us where he wants us to go. He has the right to take away from us anything he sees that that's harmful to us. He has the right to give us blessing or trouble as he sees what we each need. And he has the right to guide us as a loving Father to the place where we recognise that he owns us, that we belong to him. God is glorified when we start living on that basis – when we can say, "Lord, you are the Lord of my life." That's why Paul finished in verse 20, saying:

So glorify God in your body.

Brothers and sisters, this is what it comes down to. What does your temple look like and what's going on inside? Who's on the throne? Who's being worshipped? And is it a thing of beauty that shows off the glory of God to a world in desperate need of him?

Please pray with me: Heavenly Father we prayed earlier in the collect, asking you in your providence – in your wisdom and love toward us – to take away from us everything that is hurtful and to give us instead everything that is profitable. Father renovate our temples that they might be fit dwelling places for you and that we might show the beauty of your holiness to the world. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.