

X. Personal Holiness

February 5/7, 2013

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Aim: To recognize that Christian liberty is not a license for immorality; we are called to personal holiness because the Spirit of God dwells within us.

The subjects of sexual immorality and the purity of the assembly of the holy ones begun in chapter 5 continue. In the verses following Paul is addressing another difficult situation, where a member or members of the assembly were visiting prostitutes (v. 16). It now transpires that some felt themselves free to resort to prostitutes under, it seems, the delusion that sex beyond marriage was not altogether prohibited by their profession of faith.

The basic problem that Paul is addressing in this section is the Corinthians' misunderstanding of the significance of their physical bodies in their lives as Christian believers. How does the Christian gospel affect our understanding of sexual morality? The Corinthian Christians seem to have grasped well enough that legalism is at the heart of all man-made religions, but Paul is concerned about the implications they have drawn from it. He therefore picks up their slogan 'All things are lawful for me' and begins to argue that this does not mean that they can behave in whatever way they choose. In this section, therefore, Paul is getting to the root of the question, 'What is true Christian freedom?'

A. Philosophical Principles (1 Cor. 6:12-14)

On what basis were members of the church in Corinth encouraging sexual activities with (temple) prostitutes? They were doing so by teachings (which Paul quotes back to them). Perhaps they are examples of 'words of wisdom' from the teacher or teachers of wisdom against whom Paul spoke earlier (cp. 3:10, 17). Perhaps these saying came from teachings of Jesus which somehow found their way to Corinth where they had been twisted to sanction immoral behavior. Jesus declared all foods 'clean' and fit for 'the stomach' (Mark 7:19). Did (some of) the Corinthians twist Jesus' teaching that Sabbath healing and unwashed eating was 'lawful' into '*all things are lawful*'? Further, did they extend Jesus' permission to eat all things as permission for sexual freedom as well as table freedom?

1. A Good Principle Rescued (6:12)

¹²*"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.*

In claiming that their spirituality set them free to do anything, they were in fact redefining morality. So, Paul's first principle is that Christian liberty is not license. A man who uses his imagined freedom like that will inevitably destroy both himself and others; for the freedom that comes through the gospel is a freedom that exists only under Christ's lordship.

a) *The Principle Stated (6:12a, c)*

'All things are lawful for me.' This phrase is variously interpreted by commentators as originating from Paul (but being misapplied by the Corinthians, thus needing Pauline correction), or as originating from the Corinthian church or appropriated by them from their culture. Some commentators think that this assertion, repeated in 10:23, was a Corinthian slogan which the apostle repudiates. Others think that it was a common Corinthian saying in their liberated

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society that Paul borrows and plays off it, saying, ‘It is so *for me*, too.’ In any case, Paul states this principle to show that freedom is a relative matter.

This slogan was Paul’s way of emphasizing the freedom Christians enjoy in Christ. Prior to his conversion, he was a strict Pharisee who based his hope of salvation solely on his ability to keep the law of Moses. But the harder he tried to keep the law, the more miserable he became. Finally, by the grace of God, he came to see he could never produce enough righteousness on his own to qualify for heaven. At the same time, he came to understand that Jesus is the only one who has the kind of righteousness that is pleasing to God. When Paul came to understand this, the shackles fell off his soul and he was made free! He no longer had to monitor the minutiae of life to see if he was meticulously keeping the law. Some of the things he had been trying to avoid he now saw as completely harmless! This is what Paul made reference to when he used his slogan. It was a good slogan, and it had good reasoning behind it.

But some in the church of Corinth had seized Paul’s slogan and were using it in a way he never intended. They were actually maintaining that the freedom Paul emphasized included the freedom to sin! Specifically, they were using Paul’s slogan as a theological excuse to plunge headlong into their society’s sea of sexual immorality. So Paul must rescue his good slogan from the distortion it had suffered at the hands of the Corinthians.

b) The Principle Applied (6:12b, d)

Paul doesn’t in the least retract his slogan and thus retreat from championing Christian liberty. Instead he makes it clear his slogan was never meant to justify sexual immorality or any other sin (cp. vv. 9-10). In saying all things were lawful or permissible for him, Paul quite obviously did not include sexual immorality! In other words, when Paul said ‘all things,’ he did not literally mean all things without exception are permissible to the Christian.

What, then, did Paul mean by his slogan? He intended it to apply only to indifferent matters that are morally neutral. Christians can legitimately disagree with each other on such matters. Paul says the Christian is free to do anything not inherently wrong, but even then he needs to keep a couple of boundaries in mind.

(1) Edification

First, there is the boundary of edification: ‘but all things are not helpful.’ The word ‘profitable’ (*sumpherō*) means ‘to be of advantage.’ Even though a particular act might not be inherently wrong, it doesn’t necessarily mean the Christian should engage in it. Is it profitable to him? Will it build him up in his faith? Someone has observed that a dog can lick a skunk at any time but it just isn’t worth it!

The first question Paul asks is, ‘Is it beneficial?’ By this Paul means that when we are considering something we may think is permissible, we should also ask the question whether it helps us to develop a Christian life that is more evidently like the Lord Jesus. Before we became Christians, it is likely that the only controlling question we might ask is, ‘What’s wrong with it?’ Now, we are to ask, ‘What’s right with it?’

(2) Enslavement

The second boundary Paul places on Christian liberty is the principle of enslavement: ‘but I will not be dominated by anything.’ Paul was free in the grace of Christ to do as he pleased, but he refused to allow himself to be ‘mastered’ by anything or anyone but Christ. He would not

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become enslaved to any habit or custom and certainly not to any sin (cp. Rom. 6:14). The question each Christian must ask about anything he is legitimately free to do is whether he is in control of it, or it is in control of him. If any innocent diversion controls and dominates my life, it is no longer a freedom but a slavery. Freedoms are only freedoms as long as we are free to say ‘No’ to them.

The second question is, ‘Does it tend to master, or enslave, me?’ Here, Paul’s point seems to be that freedom involves the choice to refuse as well as to accept. Something may be lawful but if it dominates my life so that Christ is being squeezed out of the central position, then I am no longer free. We are only truly free when we are Christ’s bond slaves.

These two questions are therefore set to challenge the use of our freedom in a truly godly way. It is all too possible to enslave ourselves in the name of freedom; to be dominated by practices that do not help us, trapped in our own desires, rather than living as God’s free people. License, we need to remember, is less than liberty, not more.

2. A Poor Principle Rejected (6:13-14)

The second principle is that what a Christian does in the body has eternal significance, because it is not simply confined to this world.

a) *The Principle Quoted (6:13a)*

¹³“*Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food*”—

The Corinthians were not content merely to twist Paul’s good slogan so it was beyond recognition. They probably picked up another slogan – ‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food’ – from their society. The word ‘food’ here is in the plural (*brōmata*), meaning an unlimited diet. Food and the stomach were created by God for each other. Their relationship is purely biological. It is likely the Corinthians were using this truth as an analogy to justify sexual immorality.

The common response of many Greek philosophers to any sexual relationship was to say it was no more right or wrong than the act of eating. Sexual acts are merely gratifying a bodily appetite, nothing more. Just as the stomach was made for food and food was made for the stomach, so sex was made for the body and the body for sex!

In its relevance to sexual behavior, the argument is this: it may be claimed that just as you satisfy your appetite for food by eating, which is simply a natural physical process, so one may satisfy the sexual appetite by casual sex. Much Greek philosophy considered everything physical, including the body, to be basically evil and therefore of no value. What was done with the body or to the body did not matter. Food was food, the stomach was the stomach, and sex was sex. Sex was just a biological function like eating, to be used just as food was used, to satisfy their appetites. The argument sounds remarkably modern.

This slogan was particularly appealing to the Christians of Corinth because it enabled them to enjoy the best of both worlds. They could have Christ and the forgiveness of sins while still hanging on to their sexual immorality. Paul must show the absurdity of this slogan; he uses six arguments to show them why their pet slogan was defective and sexual immorality was wrong.

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b) The Principle Refuted (6:13b-14)

...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. ¹⁴And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

By taking his readers back to the fundamental principle, Paul shows that the comparison between food and sex is invalid. The stomach and food have only a horizontal, temporal relationship. At death the relationship ceases. But our bodies are far more than biological. For believers they also have a spiritual, vertical relationship. They belong to God and they will forever endure with God.

The stomach may be an organ of the body which is used during our earthly life, but the body is the whole person, created by God to glorify God and serve Him. Eventually, neither the stomach nor food will exist. One day, when their purpose has been fulfilled, ‘God will do away with both of them.’ That biological process has no place in the eternal state.

Not so with the body itself. The bodies of believers are designed by God for much more than biological functions. Sexual misconduct is another matter in that the body will never cease to be, a truth unfolded in chapter 15. On this analogy, therefore, sexual intercourse is not equivalent to eating a meal. It is an act of the whole person, a self-giving at every level of the personality, and it belongs to that which is destined for eternity.

Paul’s first argument has to do with the purpose of the body (v. 13). He says the body was not made for immorality but for the Lord. The apostle gives a word of true wisdom, a better proverb in mind. ‘You like slogans so much,’ Paul seems to say, ‘try this one: “The body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body.’ The body is to be the instrument of the Lord, for His use and glory.

In other words, their equating of sex and eating wouldn’t hold because sex is not to the body what food is to the stomach. What did Paul mean by his new slogan? The body is for the Lord in that he designed it as an instrument through which we can serve him. The Lord is for the body in that the body cannot function within Him. What a terrible thing, then, to take the body out of service to Him and use it in a way that is displeasing to Him!

Paul’s second point has to do with the destiny of the body (v. 14). Since food and the stomach are so closely connected, they will share the same destiny: destruction. By the same token, since the body and the Lord are so closely intertwined, they also share the same destiny! Just as the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead, so our bodies will be raised from the dead and given eternal glory.

Paul urges his readers to contemplate their long-term prospect, which is that the union between saints and their Savior is to be consummated when Christ returns. Our bodies are designed not only to serve in this life but in the life to come. They will be changed bodies, resurrected bodies, glorified bodies, heavenly bodies—but they will still be our bodies. Given the prospect of the resurrection of the body, nothing can be gained, but all may be lost, by habitual debauchery.

In all things the Christian is not to live in and for this age and its appetites as if this is all there will be. Rather, the believer is to be totally dedicated to the Lord and the age which is yet to come. The believer’s body is destined for resurrection and, therefore, as it will be ‘for the Lord’ in the coming age, so it is also ‘for the Lord’ in the present age.

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B. A Practical Example (1 Cor. 6:15-17)

Paul's third principle is that you cannot live a divided life. Rather than being destined for destruction, our bodies are destined for resurrection. Central to Paul's argument is his quotation from Genesis 2:24.

1. One with Christ (6:15)

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!*

Paul's reasoning is that because God raised Christ, He will raise the believer (v. 14), and because the latter's body will be transformed rather than replaced (15:37, 42-44, 51), it is the Lord's and must not be made available to women in extra-marital relationships. It is to use a part of Christ's own body in an act of fornication or adultery. Paul emphatically emphasizes the awfulness of this sin, 'may it never be' (*mē genoito*).

Paul's third argument has to do with the corporate implications of sexual immorality (v. 15). Again he asks a question, prefaced by, 'Do you not know?' He is talking now about the church as a whole. When a Christian commits immorality, he involves the whole body of Christ in his sin!

2. One Flesh (6:16)

¹⁶*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."*

For his fourth argument, Paul moves back to the individual Christian and the nature of the sexual act itself (vv. 16-17). Perhaps Paul employs the present tense because he is aware that some Corinthians are misbehaving in this fashion. Paul reinforces his teaching with the introduction of Genesis 2:24 concerning a man leaving his parents for his wife (*gynaika*). From the very beginning, when God made Eve for Adam, the sexual act was designed to be far more than a mere joining of bodies. It is a coming together as one body. The sexual relationship involves a union, two people become 'one flesh.' This is true of the sexual relationship, no matter who engages in it. God takes sexual sin seriously because it corrupts and shatters spiritual relationships, both human and divine.

3. One Spirit (6:17)

¹⁷*But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.*

But the Christian brings something else to the sexual relationship that makes it even more serious, and that is the spirit of Christ. Paul is probably recalling the command in Deuteronomy 10:20 for Israel to be joined to Yahweh their Lord.

Paul's statement of 'one spirit' is used to show that a Christian who commits sexual immorality involves his Lord. Since we are one with Christ, and the sex sinner is one with his partner, Christ is placed in an unthinkable position in Paul's reasoning. Christ is not personally tainted with the sin, any more than the sunbeam that shines on a garbage dump is polluted. But His reputation is dirtied because of the association.

What does it mean to be one spirit with Christ? Doesn't it mean we have the same purposes and priorities? If we are one spirit with Him and His spirit is opposed to sexual immorality, doesn't

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that mean that we must also be opposed to it? Thus, this is a figure for the union between a believer and his Lord.

C. The Spiritual Reality (1 Cor. 6:18-20)

1. The Command (6:18a)

¹⁸*Flee from sexual immorality.*

Pau commands the Corinthians to ‘flee from fornication,’ which in this context means sexual intercourse with prostitutes, most likely *temple* prostitutes. But in the broader passage begun at chapter 5 the word *porneia* means other kinds of unlawful sexual expression mentioned, whether adultery or homosexuality, to which we may justly add pre-marital sex. Holiness is mandatory.

The verb is a strong one; it means not just ‘avoid,’ but ‘run away from.’ Christians must take determined and strong action. In practice that means putting a distance between ourselves and temptation. As the section concludes, Paul gives three very good reasons why we need to be so drastic.

2. The Context (6:18b-20)

a) *A Sin against the Body (6:18b)*

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

Firstly, sexual immorality is a sin against oneself. All sins harm the sinner, but this sin may do deeper harm and leave deeper scars than we tend to imagine. Although sexual sin is not necessarily the worst sin, it is the most unique in its character. It rises from within the body bent on personal gratification. It drives like no other impulse and when fulfilled affects the body like no other sin. It has a way of internally destroying a person that no other sin has. Because sexual intimacy is the deepest uniting of two persons, its misuse corrupts on the deepest human level. That is not a psychological analysis but a divinely revealed fact. Sexual immorality is far more destructive than alcohol, far more destructive than drugs, far more destructive than crime.

Paul’s next point is that sexual sin amounts to a sin against one’s own body. It is not just a sin with the body, or in the body, but a sin *against* the body. Emphasis is placed upon ‘his own’ (*to idion*). If you have a beautiful car and break the speed limit with it, you have sinned in the car but not against it. If you used your beautiful car to haul garbage in, you would be sinning against the car. That would be a desecration of the car because it would violate the purpose for which the car was made. That is exactly what sexual sin does to the body since the body belongs to the Lord.

b) *A Sin against God (6:19a)*

¹⁹*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?*

Secondly, Paul reminds us that sexual immorality is a sin against God by once again asking another question introduced by, ‘Do you not know?’ It is a sin also against the other person involved, of course, but here the focus is on god. Paul again seems to be particularly concerned to attack the false Greek view of the body. Rather than regarding it as a despised prison for the pure spirit, from which it needs to be released, Paul describes the body as the temple of the Holy

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Spirit, the dwelling place of God Himself. For that reason it must be pure and holy, kept for His exclusive use. We belong to the Lord, our bodies are to be used for the Lord and to glorify the Lord in everything we do.

Paul's sixth contention is that the body of the Christian is inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit Himself has taken up residence in the Christian and made the Christian's body His own sanctuary or dwelling-place.

The body is not merely flesh, organs, and bones, but the total person including mind, memory, conscience, and emotions. The body of the Christian believer, so understood, is a sacred shrine indwelt by the Spirit of God. That body is meant for union with the Lord, with whom each Christian is one Spirit.

c) A Sin against Redemption (6:19b-20)

You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Lastly, Paul teaches that sexual immorality is a sin against our redemption. Just as the slaves in Corinth, many of whom were doubtless members of the church, were bought by their masters and belonged to them, so Christ has sovereign rights over all His people. He makes us His children, welcomes us into His family, but He expects us to honor Him with all that we are and have. If we use our bodies for immorality we deny His cross and frustrate His redeeming grace.

Nowhere else in the New Testament does the verb translated 'purchased' (*hagarazō*) attract the very emphatic 'at a price,' a combination intended to show the Corinthians that Christ has bought them out with nothing less than His sufferings. Because they are purchased slaves, they are not at liberty to contravene the will of their Lord.

The Holy Spirit indwells the Christian's body because the Christian is nothing less than the purchased possession of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian is not just satisfied not to defile his body, he wants actively to use his body to serve the Lord who purchased him.

Christians' bodies are God's temple, and a temple is for worship. Our bodies, therefore, have one supreme purpose: to 'glory God.' This is a call to live so as to bring honor to the person of God, who alone is worthy of our obedience and adoration.

For next time: Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-16.