

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

INTRODUCTION

When someone trusts in Christ for salvation they are set free. They are free from the bondage, guilt and power of sin and free from the constant need to prove oneself by works of righteousness. Now this was a truth that Paul was never tired of emphasising (Galatians 5:1 & 13). Paul continually rejoiced in the freedom that he and his fellow believers enjoyed in Christ.

Christ removes all sin in the life of the believer every believer is saved by grace not by works of righteousness therefore true freedom is found in Christ alone.

Now the church at Corinth had no doubt been taught this truth by Paul and others but the Corinthians like many Christians throughout the ages were using this wonderful truth as a theological excuse for sinning. Paul used the freedom in Christ truth in relationship with the idea of works of righteousness that is that salvation is achieved through good works. But the Corinthians had perverted this truth to justify their sinning.

They probably claimed that if Christ has forgiven them for all their sins and if he has released them from the bondage, guilt and power of sin then they could live anyway they liked for they have freedom in Christ. The Corinthian Christians were like people in our day who rationalise sinful thinking and habits. The Corinthians were clever at coming up with good reasons for doing wrong things.

They lived in a society that was extremely immoral and in a society where sex outside of marriage was encouraged and glorified. Now many of the believers in the church at Corinth had no doubt lived promiscuous sexual lives before their conversion and it was hard for them to break free from their old sinful habits, in fact it was easier for them to justify their sinful behaviour theologically than it was for them to give it up.

The Christians found it hard not to think about human wisdom in the way they once did and in the same way it was difficult for them to think of sexual immorality in a different way. They were so used to giving in to their sexual drives and impulses that it seemed natural for them to continue after they were converted.

In these verses Paul shows us three of the evils of sexual sin, so let's look at them now.

1. SEXUAL SIN HARMS EVERYONE INVOLVED (v 12)

The phrase "all things are lawful for me" may have been a common Corinthian saying used in their liberated society. Paul then adds the phrase "but not everything is beneficial" (v 12). In other words although every sin that a Christian commits is forgiven in Christ this does not mean that everything we do is of benefit to us.

It does not give us a license to sin because no sin is ever right or good nor does it ever reap good results, in fact the price of sin is always very high. There are no benefits in sin even if it is true that every sin is forgiven in Christ when one truly repents.

Now it is clear from the context that the particular type of sin that Paul has in mind is sexual sin. There is probably no sin that is committed that reaps as much destruction as sexual sin for it ruins marriages, homes, families and causes untold damage physically and psychologically. Sexual sin leads to people lying, cheating and even killing in order to cover up one's footsteps. Sex seems good, pleasant and enjoyable and within a loving married relationship it is but outside the marriage bond it never delivers what it promises. It offers great satisfaction but it delivers great

disappointment. It promises real life but leads to death. O the world presents it as the answer to everything, but the reality is that it is empty and leaves those who indulge in it empty and sadly for the Christian who falls in this way it leaves them spiritually empty.

Sexual sin is serious in God's eyes and we must never play it down or convince ourselves like the Corinthians did that it is natural and it is the way to express our love for others. It is the way to express your love for your wife or husband but outside of that blessed marriage relationship it leads to bondage and brings all sorts of heartache.

However let me say that for the Christian who falls into sexual sin there is forgiveness if you admit your sin and repent of it. Remember David a man described as "a man after God's own heart" yet he fell into sexual sin but praise God he came to repent of it and we can read that repentance in Psalm 51.

However we must always remember that although all sin is forgiven in Christ and we are therefore free in him the consequences of our sin is never removed and King David had to live with his consequences for the rest of his life. Sadly there are Christians today in God's church who are living with the consequences of sexual sin but praise God there is forgiveness in Christ for every sin that is repented of and confessed. It would be wrong of me to assume that even in this small congregation that there is no one who struggles with this temptation.

There may even be one who has given into that temptation. Perhaps you have confessed your sin and repented of it then remember my dear friend that Christ has died for all your sins including sexual sin and that you are free in Christ but not free to indulge in sinful behaviour. Rejoice that our God is a forgiving God. But could it be possible that there is someone who even now is engaged in sinful sexual behaviour?

Perhaps it is being justified theologically like the Corinthians. Can I appeal to you to come to your senses now, to repent of it and confess it to God and receive His forgiveness? Can I also warn you that sexual sin is always harmful and it is never beneficial even though the world tells us it is? I hope there is no one offended that I might even suggest that such sins are possible in this congregation. But I have been a Christian long enough to know that it is possible; that this sin has caught out many godly men and woman.

2. SEXUAL SIN CONTROLS THOSE WHO INDULGE IN IT (v 12)

Paul was free in Christ but refused to allow himself to be mastered by anything or anyone except Jesus Christ. He would not allow himself to be enslaved by any habit or sin. Now sexual sin is enslaving the more it is indulged in the more it controls the one who indulges in it. It starts of with one night of passion when we lose control and ends up dictating and directing our lives.

Such a sin if not resisted will eventually master and control all who give into it. Sadly it seems that there were professing Christians in Corinth who were being mastered by sexual sin and it was tolerated all in the name of freedom. But the truth is that if one is mastered by something or someone other than Christ then it is not freedom that we are enjoying but bondage.

Of course this is true of all sin but it is sexual sin that the context is particularly thinking about. But can I highlight another sin that seems to be prevalent among professing Christian people that if not resisted could lead to sexual sin. It is the sin of pornography. There was a survey done recently by a Christian organisation that showed that pornography was a problem with some Christian people, probably more than we think. For the sin of pornography is easy to commit. It can be done in the home alone.

It can give us sexual thrills and it is easily available through the Internet and magazines. Now if the survey is right then there is a number of professing Christian people who are being enslaved by this sin of pornography and if such a sin is not resisted then it could lead to physical sexual sin. You see once we allow such material into our minds and life then it can so easily begin to take over our lives and to control us.

Therefore we must be careful to avoid such sins and if we are guilty of them then seek help now and turn and receive Christ's forgiveness. Likewise with the increase of unseemly material on our televisions we must be careful that we do not allow such scenes to control us for it is so easy in the privacy of our own homes to watch material that we would be ashamed to watch in front of our children or even in front of our fellow Christians. If any of these areas are a temptation to you then turn off the television or even get rid of it or throw out the computer or at very least put controls on those things so that you will not fall into temptation. But if there is anyone who has already fallen in these areas then let me assure you that such sins will be forgiven if you turn to Christ confess your sin and repent of it. Do not allow your freedom in Christ to be used as a license to sin.

Do not allow yourself to be controlled by anything or anyone other than Christ if you need to take radical action then do so. We are free in Christ, we do not need to work our way to heaven, the bondage of sin has been broken in our lives, Christ has dealt with our guilt but do not allow our Christian freedom to be the excuse that we use for sin. Do not give in to sexual temptation in all its subtle forms and seek daily grace to live pure and holy lives for Christ.

3. SEXUAL SIN PERVERTS GOD'S PURPOSE (vs. 13-20)

So sexual sin not only harms and controls those who indulge in it but it also perverts God's plan and purpose for the body. Every part of the Christian belongs to the Lord and ought to be used for bringing glory to his name. We ought to glorify God with our minds and we ought to glorify God with our emotions and we ought to glorify God with our bodies. Paul says three things about the Christian's body. A Christian's body is for the Lord, it is a member of Christ and it is the temple of the Holy Spirit

a) The Body Is For The Lord (vs. 13-14). – Food and the stomach were created by God for each other (v 13). Their relationship is purely biological. Now it is likely that the Corinthians were using this truth as a parallel to justify sexual immorality. The Greek text literally says “the foods the belly, the belly the foods.”

Perhaps this was a popular proverb meant to celebrate the idea that sex is no different from eating; the stomach was made for food and the body was made for sex. Paul says that it is true that food and the stomach were made for each other but it is also true that the relationship is purely temporal. One day when their purpose has been fulfilled God will do away with both of them for that biological process has no place in the eternal state.

But that is not the case with the body itself. The body of believers are designed for God they are instruments to serve him they were not made to simply fulfil some biological functions. Therefore Paul's conclusion is that the body is not meant for sexual immorality but it is meant for the Lord and the Lord for the body (v 13). What Paul is saying is very simple the body is to be an instrument for the Lord; it is to be used in serving his purposes in this world and used for the purpose of bringing glory to him.

Therefore indulging in sexual immorality is clearly a misuse of the purpose of the body, such an activity is not fulfilling God's purposes and it certainly does not bring glory to his name. Therefore the thinking of the Corinthians is so flawed that there needs to be a true repenting before they can begin to use their bodies for God's purposes.

But Paul goes even further for he says that our bodies are designed not only to serve in this life but in eternity as well. We will one day have changed bodies, bodies that are suitable for our new eternal state, they will be resurrected bodies, and glorified bodies but they will still be our bodies' (v 14). Whereas the stomach and food have only a horizontal, temporal relationship for at death that relationship ceases that is not the case with our bodies.

Our bodies are far more than a biological necessity for they also have a vertical spiritual dimension. They belong to God and our bodies will forever live with God in heaven when our souls and bodies are reunited at the resurrection. Just as Christ was raised from the dead so one day we too will be raised like Christ and given our new resurrected bodies so that we can live and serve our God forever in heaven.

Therefore Paul's whole point is really very simple. We need to take care of our bodies and use them for his glory because they will rise in glory one day to be an instrument that will serve God for all eternity. Now the Corinthians are clearly not taking care of their bodies or using them for God's glory for they are indulging in sexual immorality and they are doing so in the name of Christian freedom.

What Paul is doing is giving us a theological framework why sex outside marriage is wrong. The Corinthians had placed their sexual immorality in a theological framework a wrong framework but it was a framework. They claimed that their immorality was a matter of exercising Christian freedom and besides the body was made for sex and sex for the body. Paul says that the theological matter that they need to consider is the fact that their bodies belong to the Lord and therefore they should glorify God with their bodies and clearly sexual immorality does not glorify God. Likewise each one of us must remember this principle as well. It is important that we look after our bodies. That means keeping ourselves pure sexually. Let me speak to our young people I know that the temptation to explore with sex outside of marriage is great.

I know that your peers talk about sex and some even indulge in it. But you must remember that there is a spiritual aspect that always must be considered. Our bodies belong to the Lord they should be used as instruments that will bring glory to His great name.

One of the ways that you can do that is to keep yourself pure sexually and to wait for that right person who the Lord has already marked out just for you. Unless he grants you the gift of singleness but we will come to that in the next chapter.

We must also remember when it comes to the body that there are other things that will bring dishonour to our God. If we abuse our bodies through excess eating or drinking then our bodies will not function as they should and we will not bring honour to our God. If we are generally out of condition then that does not bring glory to God either. We must lovingly care for our bodies, keep ourselves reasonable fit and generally care for ourselves for in doing so we will bring honour to God and it will enable us to use our bodies in the service of God. Of course we must not be like the world; that is obsessive about these things. Fitness is the in thing, watching ones diet is all consuming with some people.

Our physical appearance can so easily become a god as it does with so many. But as long as we keep our eye on the principle, which is that our body belongs to the Lord, and we should honour and glorify him with our bodies then that will help us to keep the balance in all these things.

b) The Body Is A Member Of Christ (vs. 15-18) – The believer's body is not only for the Lord but it is of the Lord for believers are a part of the Lord's own body (v 15). Paul says our bodies are members of Christ. We are told elsewhere that the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). Believers in this world are a living spiritual temple in which Christ dwells; we are his body in this world.

Paul's next point follows on logically. For a Christian to commit sexual immorality is to take Christ's own body (the church) and unite it with a prostitute. In doing so we are uniting Christ himself with the prostitute. The idea is totally incomprehensible to Paul, as indeed it should be to every true believer (never v 15). You see sexual relations involve a union between the man and the woman involved for they become one flesh (v 16. cf. Genesis 2:24).

Sex is not just fulfilling an appetite but it involves a real union with the person involved, there is more to it than simply a physical act. Sex is an expression of the union that takes place between one man and one woman in marriage. Therefore as members of Christ's body, Christ lives in us by his Spirit and when we indulge in sexual immorality we are uniting Christ and his church with the person involved in a theological way.

When a Christian indulges in sexual immorality he or she involves the Lord for He lives within that Christian person involved in the sin. Now all sex outside of marriage is sin but when Christians commit it, it is particularly reprehensible because it profanes Jesus Christ in whom the believer is united by faith. So I hope you follow Paul's thinking. Since we are one with Christ and sex unites people in one flesh therefore Christ is placed in an unthinkable position in Paul's reasoning. Now of course Christ can never be personally tainted by the sins of his people but his reputation is soiled because of his association with his people. It is no wonder that Paul instructs the Corinthians to flee from sexual immorality (v 18). The present tense indicates that they are to flee continually and that is what we must do if we are being tempted in sexual ways.

We are to flee from it as far as possible; there is no shame in running away. When sex presents itself to us outside of our marriage bond then take Paul's advice run away do not trust yourself to resist the temptation for this temptation is so strong and so overpowering that we must not pretend that we can resist it. We simply must flee. That applies to our young people but it applies to us all for this temptation affects us all.

It will affect some of us more than others and our young people in particular will feel this temptation more than most. That's why we must pray that our Christian young people will remain sexually pure, pray that God will give them and us all the grace to flee from sexual immorality so that we will not profane the name of the Lord or dishonour his church.

c) The Body Is The Temple Of The Holy Spirit (vs. 19-20) – As Christians our bodies are not our own, they belong to the Lord they are members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit. So Paul calls for sexual purity because our bodies do not belong to us but to God. We are God's temple He indwells our life and so when a believer falls into sexual sin he is committing the act in the very place where God lives.

Our bodies do not belong to us they belong to the Lord and costs him the life of his Son who came into our world and paid the price for sin. The result is that the Holy Spirit took up permanent residence in us and we belong to Him therefore the purpose of our lives is to glorify God and that includes the way we use our own bodies. Remember sexual sin harms the people involved as well as others. Sexual sin controls those who indulge in it.

Sexual sin perverts God's purpose for sex and for our bodies. Remember the body is for the Lord. The body is a member of Christ and the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore in the light of all that has been said let me close as Paul closes this chapter. Therefore honour God with your body.

Amen