

It was difficult to live as a Christian in Corinth. In sin city, promiscuity was seen as a part of participating in various religions, and such activity was believed to be a natural part of good health, and even bring good fortune. A typical person in Corinth would be involved in promiscuity, become converted, but not stop such activity. As a result, it may surprise us to learn that church members in Corinth were involved in prostitution.

Since the 1960s in America, our society's slogan is - if it feels good, do it. Our culture teaches that God accepts people as they are and that God does not require people to change their living in order to follow God. So this passage answers this question - can a person become converted, and continue to live without limits, like any unbeliever might do?

The Biblical answer is no. God requires complete abstinence, except in the instance of marriage of one man and one woman. God's clear truth is that we must not have intimate relations outside the commitment of marriage. Whenever people do, there is damage. But the more subtle truth is that we also ought not to be looking around, wanting what we see, or getting as close as we can. We Christians living in such a culture must be aware of how much we are impacted by such cultural practices, and learn to flee its immorality.

Because Christ redeemed us, we must honor God with our spirits and our bodies.

1. Christian liberty is important, but does not override the deeper fact that your body is both designed and redeemed for the Lord, not for immorality. (v.12-15)

Paul began by stating three slogans that were being used by Christians in the church in Corinth as reasons to be involved in immorality, and then Paul gave his response to each.

Slogan #1

Response to slogan #1.

Verse 12, "*All things are lawful for me,*" *but not all things are helpful.*

The issue was freedom. Christian liberty. Freethinkers had the opinion that they could do whatever they chose to do, even when it was forbidden by God's commands.

What was Paul's first response to this bad slogan? Yes, it is possible for you to do what is forbidden. But what would be the result? Answer: not all things are helpful. How so? The word Paul uses here "*helpful*" refers to helpful for us all, or what is the best for the common good, or for the good of us all together. One way

to interpret this is, what brings to our community the biggest measure of blessings?

Paul was challenging bad logic with good logic. If it seems so logical that all things are permissible, then we must not overlook a corresponding logic, are all things equally advantageous to our whole community? What about the others who are impacted?

Now Paul repeated the first slogan, and gave a second answer to it.

Slogan #2

'All things are lawful for me,'

Response to slogan #2.

but I will not be dominated by anything."

In response to the phrase "all things," Paul here used the word "anything." Further, in Paul's sentence here in the Greek language, there is a literary cleverness. The word *lawful* in the slogan, and the word *dominated* in Paul's second reply, both have the same root word '*authority*'

We could catch the cleverness in English if we say it this way: I HAVE POWER OVER ALL THINGS, BUT THERE IS NOT ANYTHING HAS POWER OVER ME.

Here is the problem - first a person does immorality, but then quickly that immorality traps that person by means of enslaving that person to sin. Addiction.

Being enslaved or addicted to sin is not freedom.

I have power or authority to do all things, but they don't have power over me? No, it does not work that way.

Here is how an American says it, "I can stop anytime I want!"

Paul says No you can't. Paul says – who are you fooling here? Yourself!

Only under the authority of Christ, and within our close walk with Christ, can we enjoy true freedom.

In verse 13, Paul states another slogan. We could call it slogan #3.

Slogan #3

Verse 13, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—

Response to slogan #3.

and God will destroy both one and the other

This had become a famous phrase in the city of Corinth - food for the stomach, the stomach for food - because the phrase took the same two nouns and reversed them. It was clever and catchy. But the meaning of the phrase had limits.

The Corinthians were hinting that

the digestive system was to be used and enjoyed and

the reproductive system was to be used and enjoyed.

How did Paul answer that?

First, Paul acknowledged that there was some truth to the fact that the stomach was designed to receive food, and that God gave us food to enjoy by putting it into our

bellies. But there is a limit. Food is used up, we people die, our stomachs included.

Why did Paul answer this way? Because we have both a body and a soul, so we need to push past merely the bodily activities of this life on earth in order to come up with the greater truth that guides us for the good of our souls.

Animals have a body but not a soul. So animals eat food. But what is different about us as humans is that we are made in the image of God, that we possess a soul, and so we must ask a greater question than the body/stomach/animal/food/eating. The greater question is this: what is the purpose of our eating? It is a greater question, with a greater answer.

Over in chapter ten, Paul wrote it out with these memorable words – “...*whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*”

The purpose of our eating is for the glory of God!

Now how taking this logic regarding the purpose of fulfilling our food appetite to asking what is the purpose of fulfilling our sexual appetite? Yes, we also participate and enjoy fulfilling this appetite for the exact same reason – for the glory of God.

Both appetites must be fulfilled only within the limits, within the safety and beauty of God’s gift to us. We drive cars. But do we drive them into Lake Michigan? No, cars stay on the road, trains stay on the tracks, and bodily intimacy stays within the privacy and exclusivity of husband and wife.

Who says so? God our Creator says this is the limit, and we must obey!

Did you ever try to eat rocks or drink motor oil?

Did you ever try to eat spoiled meat or drink sour milk?

God sets limits on food for our stomachs. Within the limits, food is a beautiful thing. Outside of those limits, it is dangerous, harmful, and painful.

Similarly, God set limits on our intimate behaviors. Within the limits, it is a beautiful thing. Outside of those limits, it is dangerous, harmful, and painful.

Paul goes on to explain in verse 13, “...*The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*”

Your body does not belong to you in order for you to do whatever you want to do with your body.

Your body does not belong to your spouse, either.

Your body belongs to the Lord. Your spouses’ body belongs to the Lord.

God gave the body of a husband to his wife as a gift, and God gave the body of the wife to her husband as a gift.

Both food and the stomach have passing significance – temporary value.

But both your body and your Lord have lasting significance – permanent value.

Some people think that you children can eat all the candy they want without brushing their baby teeth, because you get a whole new set of teeth!

Similarly, some people think that you can use this body how you want, because we get a whole new body! No, that is not Biblical thinking.

Verse 14, “...*God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.*”

Our physical bodies, created by God and then stained by our sins, will at our deaths be buried. However, burial is not the end of our bodies. Because we have been redeemed by Christ Jesus, our bodies belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that very same body in which you find yourself right now – that same body will be raised up out of the grave!

Despite knowing this, believers in Corinth still went into temples of false religions, and approached prostitutes! They knew better! 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!*”

Paul wrote 2 words in Greek to communicate what we have in English as “never.” “*No! May it never be!*” Impossible. Certainly not.

How was the church in the moral gutter of sin city going to be a holy church? Paul had the answer.

2. Immorality must be avoided with great effort and concern. (v.16-18)

Verse 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.”*”

Again this phrase. ‘*DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT?*’ They did know. Paul had taught them again and again that they belonged to Jesus, with both body and soul.

Here is a lie that fornicators like to tell – the affair did not mean anything.

Wrong! Paul showed that when they united with another person, they shared a common existence with that person. This sin was never strictly physical. There was a bonding that happened.

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

The word “joined to” is “cleave to,” or “glued to.” A Christian is very close to the Lord. We are glued to the Lord in body and spirit.

Our body and soul are a unit – and we serve the Lord with both.

The Holy Spirit dwells within us as Christian people. The Spirit is present with us in our spirits, which are in our bodies. Wherever we go, we bring our bodies, we bring our Spirits, and we bring the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit.

Since this is true, what must we do when presented with yet another opportunity for immorality? Run!

Verse 18, “*Flee from sexual immorality...*”

There is an echo here of the Old Testament holy man named Joseph, when he ran away from immorality so fast that he left his coat in the hand of the woman trying to seduce him! Genesis 39:12. He ran with his body. He actually ran.

Why must we run?

Because immorality is detrimental to both your body and your soul. There are struggles of guilt and shame attached to these sins that other sins do not have, not to mention health issues, pregnancy, and possible divorce. Paul provides wisdom to flee because wisdom knows that to engage in such illicit relations sets in motion a set of theological, moral, emotional, and physical consequences. It is never casual behavior. It is never innocent and natural and simply expressing love for a close friendship. No. It is hurting another person, and many more are impacted. Anyone who does this is even hurting himself or herself.

Since it is so destructive, why do people still pursue it? Selfishness. Self-gratification. Lack of self-control. Immaturity. Not thinking it through. Lack of diligence and commitment, lack of effort to stay far away from it. Basically, not a failure to resist it, but rather a failure to flee from it. Failure to see it as short-term pleasure followed by long-term pain.

Verse 18, *“Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”*

For the sins of alcohol, greed, overeating, we need something. Sexual immorality is different from all other sins, because all that is needed is the body.

God created us with these abilities.

God forgave us and redeemed us, while we retain these abilities.

God is sanctifying us with our use of these same abilities.

The husband and wife who are in the Lord, when they communicate their love for each other in this intimate way, do not experience guilt and alienation from God and from one another. Quite the opposite. They experience the holy blessing of God.

3. Your body is not yours to use however you choose. At the cross, your body and spirit were bought, making you a temple for The Holy Spirit! (v.19-20)

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, ...”*

This is another reason to flee immorality. Because your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit!

What is a guitar case for? It is the place for a guitar!

What is a perfume bottle for? It is the place for perfume?

What is your body for? It is the place for the Holy Spirit.

That means your body is holy. Your body is sacred.

What do we call a place with artwork? A museum

What do we call a place with sports games? A sports complex.

What do we call a place reserved for a god? A temple.

You are a temple. Your body is a place in which the Holy Spirit lives.

Verse 20, *“for you were bought with a price...”*

This verse refers to Jesus’ death on the cross where He paid the price of our

redemption. Jesus paid for our freedom from sin. We share in His blessings.

Conclusion:

We borrow Paul's final statement. *SO – GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY!*

Here Paul turned this issue around to a very positive calling. We must go way beyond avoiding sin, and go so far as to glorify God in our bodies!

Just like we use a guitar case to safely take the guitar from one place to another, so we use a temple of the Holy Spirit to take the Holy Spirit with us. The Holy Spirit is with us everywhere - from home to work to school to church to the store and to walking the dog. In all things that we do, we use our bodies in a holy way. Why? To glorify God. To show what a great God we have. To demonstrate what our lives are all about.

Our lives are all about showing the greatness of Jesus, who bought us. We belong to Jesus. Our sinful desires of our flesh do not control us – we put them to death. All that remains is Christ living in us, by His Spirit. All that we do is for Jesus. All that we say is for Jesus. Every time we use our bodies to eat or to drink or anything else – it is all for the glory of Jesus, out of thankfulness to Him for His many, many good gifts from above. We enjoy the gifts of God now. We look forward to eternity future, to praise God forever, and honor Him with our resurrected bodies in heaven.

Ephesians 5:25-27, *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”*

In the eyes of God, we are all pure virgins. We are cleansed from all of our sins, and we are clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness. We live to honor Christ.