

# **One With Christ - *1 Corinthians 6:12-20***

## **Introduction**

- Today, we're looking at a passage in which Paul is talking with the church all about sexual immorality.
- The area of sexuality, as we've mentioned before, was one in which there had been a lot of compromise in the church, and so it was really important for Paul to stop to take the time to address it head on.
- And we've seen this come up in the last couple weeks, it was there in chapter 5, and it was there in the passage that we looked at last week, but it wasn't really the primary focus.
- Well today, we're looking at the second half of chapter 6, where Paul deals directly with this issue of sexual immorality.
- And just like the last few weeks, this passage isn't necessarily easy, it's one that might make us squirm a little bit, but I hope that as we read what Paul says in these difficult passages, and learn to look at life through the "lens of the Gospel", we'll see how Paul's words in passages like this are actually such good news for us.
- Because as we move through the passage, we're going to see how Paul calls the church, not only to reject sexual immorality, but to have a deeper appreciation for the relationship that they have with Christ through the Gospel.

## **Dismantling the Church's Arguments**

- And as we look at this passage, we're going to see that Paul is very methodical in how he goes about addressing this issue.
- Before he actually starts to teach the church, he begins with addressing some of the flawed arguments the church was using to make it seem like what they were doing wasn't really that bad in V. 12-14. He needs to deconstruct their flawed way of thinking before he can really get anywhere with them.
- And there were two main arguments that the Corinthians were using to justify their sexual immorality, so Paul's goal in these first few verses, is to show why those arguments really don't hold any water.
- To start, a big thing for the Corinthians was to focus heavily on the idea of the freedom that they had in Christ and the Gospel, and use that freedom to justify whatever they wanted to do,

specifically in the case of this passage, sexual immorality. That's where we get this statement in V. 12, saying:

*“All things are lawful for me” - 1 Cor. 6:12a (ESV)*

- Some of your translations may have that phrase in quotation marks. That's because this would have been the argument, or almost catch phrase, that would have been used by the church. The response they would have given if questioned about their sinful behaviour.
- But Paul pushes back in V. 12, saying

*“‘All things are lawful for me, ’but not all things are helpful.’” - 1 Cor. 6:12a (ESV)*

- You see, he's beginning to show the church that their freedom in Christ was not license to do whatever. We saw that a bit when we looked at 1 Corinthians 5, and it comes up again here.
- And as we think about that, it's important to realize that, on one hand, their argument did actually have some merit. This idea of their freedom in the Gospel was something that Paul would have taught them while he was with them, and it's actually an argument that we'll see him use himself later on in this book.
- The issue, however, is that there was a lot that the Corinthians were missing about what Christ had accomplished in them through the Gospel. And it's that thinking that Paul seeks to correct here. They were taking this argument, *“all things are lawful for me”*, and drastically mis-applying it, resulting in all sorts of issues.
- In the second half of V. 12, Paul emphasizes this point, repeating that same argument.

*“‘All things are lawful for me, ’but I will not be dominated by anything.’” - 1 Cor. 6:12b (ESV)*

- Again, Paul is showing the limitations of this way of thinking. While the church may argue that *“all things were lawful for them”*, that didn't mean that everything was helpful to them, or was good to do, and it wasn't an excuse to just give in to every urge and impulse that came their way, or be *“dominated”* by their desires.
- So that's the first argument that Paul is dismantling in this passage, then the other argument that he addresses here, which the church was using to justify sexual sin, is found in the beginning of V. 13:

*“‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food’—and God will destroy both one and the other.” - 1 Cor. 6:13a (ESV)*

- This was the second argument that the Corinthians were using, and essentially what they were saying is that “our souls have been saved by Christ, so who really cares what we do with our bodies? In the long run, what does it change?”
- They make this comparison to the stomach and food.
- To eat is just a basic need for human survival. If you’re hungry, you eat, that’s just a part of being a human being.
- So the Corinthians were taking this logic and applying it to sex. In the same way that you eat when you’re hungry, when your body has sexual desires, you fulfil them. It’s just part of the way that our bodies work and it’s not really a big deal.
- In the long run, as you see in the second part of the verse, our bodies are temporary, and it’s our soul that really lasts, so don’t be too worried about satisfying the urges of your body, because your body is temporary.
- And again, Paul responds to this argument, showing how the Corinthians have gotten it all wrong.
- He says in the next part of V. 13 and V. 14:

*“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.” - 1 Cor. 6:13b-14 (ESV)*

- Right away Paul corrects this second argument. And this is important because in order to understand the response that Paul is going to give to the first argument, he first needs to help the church to see the significance of their bodies. They really do have a meaning and a purpose beyond just being a vessel for our souls, a temporary kind of shell with no real importance.
- Leon Morris comments really well on this part of the passage, and this is what he says:
  - *“The body cannot be dismissed as unimportant; the body is for the Lord. It is the instrument wherein we serve God. It is the means whereby we glorify God. The Lord for the body shows that just as food is necessary if the stomach is to function, so is the Lord necessary if the body is to function. It is only as God enables us that we can live the kind of life for which we were meant.”*
- There really is purpose and value to our bodies, and this is something that Paul continues to emphasize all through the passage.
- These, in essence, were the two main arguments of the Corinthians when it came to sexual immorality. We are free in Christ, and our souls have been saved, so who cares what we do with our bodies?

- And as Paul has given an answer to one of these arguments already, the rest of the passage is focused on looking at the other one.
- And I want to take a moment to look at these arguments, and consider our own culture. We said at the beginning of our series that 1 Corinthians is a book that is so relevant for us today, especially here in Toronto.
- How often do we make arguments just like the Corinthians? We want what we want, so we come up with all sorts of ways to justify whatever it is that we're wanting to do, and explain how, when you really think about it, what we're doing isn't wrong. This is especially true when it comes to things like sex, and we use arguments really similar to this. "Well it's my body, it's not hurting anyone else, so what's the harm?"
- Well the rest of this passage is all Paul explaining exactly what the "harm" is that comes from this kind of thinking, and as we go through this together, we'll see how Paul teaches the church how the Gospel transforms our view of sex.
- And all of this brings up a question, which ends up being central to Paul's discussion in this chapter, as well as our understanding of sexuality, and that is: What is true Christian freedom?
- We see in Paul's response to the position of the Corinthians that "freedom" is not a license to do whatever we want, so what is it? And how does it apply to our sexuality?

## **Correcting the Church's Arguments**

- Well, as we move into the next section, looking at V. 15-17, now that Paul has pointed out the flaws in the Corinthians' arguments, showing where they fall short, he begins to replace those flawed arguments with a proper understanding of sexuality, in light of the Gospel.
- It's here that Paul helps us to put on our "Gospel Lenses", showing how Christ's sacrifice changes how we view sex, our bodies, and our freedom in the Gospel.
- He begins in saying in V. 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!" - 1 Cor. 6:15 (ESV)*

- Again, Paul is beginning to take the thinking of the church, which was so wrong, and replacing it with the truth of the Gospel. Like I said before, there was an element of validity to the arguments of the church, they were indeed free in Christ. Set free from the power of sin, and yet they were taking that freedom as justification for their sin.
- So Paul points out to the church that, because of the Gospel, they have become "*members of Christ*". There's a special level of intimacy there, to have actually become one with him through his sacrifice on the cross.

- Then immediately after this, Paul asks if we should want to have that same level of intimacy and connection with a prostitute. To take the “members” of Christ, and make them “members” of a prostitute. The wording in those two scenarios is the same, intending to show such a shocking contrast that you come to the same emphatic conclusion that Paul does at the end of the verse. *Never!*
- To connect those two is to show the church that these acts of sexual immorality, such as prostitution, which they had been taking so lightly, were actually incredibly weighty matters, which couldn’t be handled so flippantly, or easily justified away.
- Sex is not just a meaningless physical act that is meant to satisfy the urges of our bodies, it is something that is incredibly important and intimate, to the point that it is compared to the level of intimacy we experience with Christ through the Gospel. It’s not something to be taken lightly.
- Paul then focuses in on the significance of sex, and the intimacy involved in V. 16-17. This is what he says:

*“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.” - 1 Cor. 6:16-17 (ESV)*

- In this verse, Paul emphasizes a point that he’s made up to this point, which is meant to significantly inform how the Corinthians see this issue.
- Not only are they “free in Christ”, as they had been claiming, but they have actually become “one with Christ”. That is the part of the Gospel that they had been missing in this situation, which is the primary focus of Paul’s argument in this passage. The church focused so much on their “freedom” as a license to do what they wanted, but they missed the reality of their beautiful union with Christ. And in doing so, this “freedom” which they were so proud of, was really just a different kind of bondage to the same things that Christ came to free us from.
- In describing the level of intimacy that is involved in sexual union, Paul says, “*The two will become one flesh*”. What he’s doing there is quoting from Genesis 2:24, which is a verse that comes right after the creation of Adam and Eve, and says:
  - *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” - Gen. 2:24 (ESV)*
- Paul is very intentional in drawing this connection, as he’s making a statement about how sex is to be enjoyed properly.
- The only context in which sexual activity should be taking place is within the context of a marriage between one man and one woman, as the Bible lays out. Any sexual activity outside

of that relationship falls under the category of sexual immorality that Paul is talking about here.

- And he also makes clear through this reference that sex is something far more meaningful than the Corinthians were giving it credit for. It's more than just something that you do with your body to satisfy certain urges. It is something that is much more intimate, that two become one flesh.
- While the terms used for our intimacy with Christ, and our intimacy in sex have been the same up to this point, Paul distinguishes them here, saying that we become "*one flesh*" through sex, but through the Gospel we become "*one Spirit*" with Christ. It is so much greater, so why would we want to set that aside in the name of satisfying our sexual appetite. Our relationship with Christ should be the #1 priority.
- So even when it comes to sex, enjoyed in its proper context, between a husband and wife, our intimacy and relationship with Christ should still be the primary and most important relationship in our life.

## **Instructions for the Church**

- Then, in light of the Gospel lens that Paul has just explained, as he has corrected the backwards thinking of the church, he gives some practical instruction starting in V. 18. He takes these last few verses to help the church see how the Gospel lens, which he's just explained, changes how they operate on a practical level. He says:

*"Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body." - 1 Cor. 6:18 (ESV)*

- Look at that word, "*Flee!*" Not just avoid, but actively run away from sexual immorality. Do everything that you can to keep yourself away from it. It's just not worth it.
- Paul really wants the church to understand how serious this is.
- We're called to take sex seriously, not trying to get as close to the line as we can without crossing over it, justifying this action or that, but rather keeping as far away from sexual immorality as possible, and actually turning and running in the other direction.
- And as we run in the other direction, away from that immorality, and the bondage that comes with it, we run straight to the cross, and to the Gospel. Look at what Paul says in V. 19:

*"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?" - 1 Cor. 6:19a (ESV)*

- Our bodies are “temples” of the Holy Spirit. We often think about how we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, but don’t think so much about the “temple” aspect, and what that really means.
- The implication there, going back to something from a little earlier, is that our bodies are a gift that are meant to be used for the worship of God.
- When you have given your life to Christ, you actually have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, living inside of you. Your body becomes a temple, the dwelling place of the one true God, and the purpose of that temple, of our bodies, is to worship him.
- So in light of what Paul has taught the church, about the value and the significance of their bodies, he calls them to respond by giving up their habit of justifying whatever they want to do in the name of “freedom”, and rather remember the union that they have with Christ through the Gospel, and flee from sexual immorality, in order to use our bodies for their intended purpose of worshipping God.
- Which brings us to the final verse.

## Conclusion

- The last verse essentially provides a summary of Paul’s argument throughout the passage.
- This is what he says in verse 20:

*“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” - 1 Cor. 6:19b-20 (ESV)*

- Boom. Mic drop.
- So yes you are free in Christ, but that freedom required a heavy price. It came at the cost of our saviours life. It isn’t some light thing that we should be throwing around to justify whatever we want to do, it is a profound reality that should cause us to worship our Lord, and live in that freedom to bring him the glory that he deserves.
- Anthony Thistleton sums this up so well:
  - *“Dale Martin and others rightly argue that purchase by another, or being bought with a price, signifies transference of ownership from one master or “lord” to another. The Christian is not purchased out of slavery simply to gain some new autonomous “freedom” in which he or she faces the world on their own. In such a situation they face every hazard alone, and might even face becoming enslaved again to a worse master. Christ purchases or redeems men and women as his. Henceforth it is he who has them in his care. They belong to Christ.”*

*“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” - 1 Cor. 6:19b-20 (ESV)*

- This is Paul’s answer to the question of what true Christian freedom is.
- True Christian freedom is found in our union with Christ, to glorify him with our entire being.
- And this is a message for every single one of us, which we need to be reminded of daily. The reality is that no matter who you are, man or woman, married or single, we all struggle with this. We are all sexually broken people who need the Gospel, and we need to daily be putting on our “Gospel Lenses” to understand how Christ’s sacrifice, and our union with him transforms how we view this, most intimate part of our life. Without that lens, without the Gospel, all of us will still live as slaves to our sinful desires. It is only through Christ that we find the freedom to live for him and glorify him with every part of ourselves.
- So as you think about how the Gospel impacts how you view your sexuality, remember these words from Paul: *“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body”*.
- True Christian freedom is found in our union with Christ, to glorify him with our entire being.