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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS
 #17

GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODIES
1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

INTRODUCTION

After reminding the Corinthians of what they were before being united to Christ, He now moves on to address an on-going problem within their congregation; sexual immorality. But Paul is careful to handle this problem within clear theological boundaries. On the one hand, he joyfully acknowledges the freedom that believers experience in Jesus. He does not want to present the Christian life as some new form of slavery so he must remind us of the freedom Jesus obtained for us. On the other hand, he knows our ability to *turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh* (*Galatians 5:13*). Therefore, Paul must uphold the truth of Christian freedom while stringently warning against its abuses.

1. MISUSING OUR FREEDOM (6:12)

Primarily we are free from these enslavements: (1) the wrath and curse of God [Romans 8:1]; (2) slavery to sinful desires [Romans 6:14] and (3) Old Covenant ceremonies and regulations [Romans 14:14]. In short, we are free to love and serve Jesus and one another as the Word and Spirit teach us. But we are not free from the remaining corruption of our flesh. Neither are we free from the moral law of God summarized in the 10 Commandments. Therefore, there is always the temptation to set aside God's clear commands and *turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh* (*Galatians 5:13*). Because we are not perfectly free from sin, we continue to find some short-term pleasure in violating God's commands. The Moral Law provides a pathway in which we can walk in holiness. Our sinful tendency is to excuse our departing from the God-given path under the guise of Christian freedom. The Corinthians did this and they even had slogans promoting the sin; verse 12 contains one such slogan.

The phrase *All things are lawful for me* was most likely a "theological slogan" [Fee] commonly used among the Corinthians. There is some truth in this phrase; through Christ, God has given believers tremendous freedom from the law's condemnation and we have freedom in nonessential issues such as food, drink, observing religious days and ceremonies, and all other such matters. The problem is that the Corinthians used this phrase in its most absolute sense. They refused to recognize the clear commands of God as a safe pathway through life. Therefore, it appears they continued to visit prostitutes.

Paul corrected their thinking by stating two facts. First of all, we must not only ask is some action lawful, but we must also ask "is this action helpful to others who observe me. How does this influence my brothers and sisters in Christ? Is this action a demonstration of goodness, faithfulness and self-control? Does it demonstrate loving and concerned Christian maturity?" Secondly, Paul points out that practicing true Christian freedom does not lead to being mastered by that very "freedom". The Corinthians claimed that sexual immorality was an act of freedom;

Paul reminds them of its power to enslave. This was another evidence they abused Christian freedom.

Is sexual immorality lawful, beneficial and freeing? The world cries “yes”. God declares sexual immorality to be unlawful, harmful and enslaving. Not only does God’s Word prove this to be so, but so do our own experiences. Think of your sin and remember the pain so closely associated with it. Did you ever prosper because of immorality, deceit and rebellion? Or did you suffer heartache, broken relationships and emptiness? Sexual immorality often brings nearly immediate suffering; therefore, we should not be surprised that unconfessed sexual immorality will bring eternal suffering [1 Corinthians 6:9-11].

2. MISUSING OUR BODIES (6:13-20)

Not only is immorality a misuse of Christian freedom, but it is a misuse of the Christian’s body. In verse 13, we encounter another Corinthian slogan, *Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them*. God made food for our stomachs and is an obvious biological relationship that will end with this age. It seems they applied this same philosophy to the body and sexual immorality. If we are hungry, we eat and this is how God made things to work. The Corinthians said, “if we want to have sex, we go see a prostitute”. Obviously, this is a misuse of our bodies because they belong to the Lord and will never be destroyed. *The body...is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body*.

God proved that our bodies matter when the Lord Jesus took a human body in the incarnation. He further proved this when that same body was raised from the dead (v14a). Truly, *the Lord is for the body*. And our bodies are important to the Lord because, like Jesus, these very same bodies will be raised from the dead (v14b).

Moreover, our bodies matter to the Lord because our *bodies are members of Christ* (v15a). Paul says that to be physically united to a prostitute is incompatible with being united with Christ. We are one with Christ; we are not to become one with another through sexual immorality. We belong to Christ; we are not to act as if we belong to a prostitute by engaging in sexual immorality (v15b). Paul continues along this line of explanation in verses 16-17. When a man engages in sexual immorality, he literally joins his body with another person’s body. In marriage, this is a blessed joining [See Genesis 2:24], but outside of marriage, it is forbidden and cursed. When one is united to the Lord, he is united with Jesus in such a way that he cannot unite himself sexually with a prostitute (vv16-17).

Paul’s conclusion: *Flee immorality* (v18a). Immorality is forbidden and cursed; it is enslaving. Therefore, we are not to pursue it or even flirt with it; we are to flee from it. If we engage in it, a man *sins against his own body*. I think this means that a man fundamentally misuses his body that now belongs to the Lord. He joins his body with a prostitute through sexual intercourse while he is joined to Christ. Paul says this is a particularly dreadful sin for a Christian.

Finally, Paul reminds the believer that his body is so much a part of God’s plan that God has indwelt us with His Holy Spirit (v19). Therefore, we cannot misuse our bodies because they are an essential aspect of God’s redemptive purpose (v20).

CONCLUSION

Jesus purchased our redemption with His body. One aspect of our redemption is the renewal of our own bodies. We, our bodies included, rightfully belong to Jesus. We cannot willingly give our bodies to another apart from the blessing of God. We must *flee immorality*.

Paul uses the term *bought* to remind the Corinthians of the slavery they once endured. God freed them from slavery. They should not go willingly into slavery once again. Yet, to give ourselves to sexual immorality is to give ourselves to slavery all over again. Our bodies matter because they will last forever. Do not disregard the freedom that comes through obedience.