

Christian Liberty and Sexual Freedom

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

Code: 1827

INTRODUCTION

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, the apostle Paul describes the biblical perspective of sexual morality. He gives the basis for Christian liberty and sexual freedom. And unless you know the Lord Jesus Christ, Christian morality will be very hard to understand.

A. The Conduct

1. The morality defined

The Corinthian church had been taught by Paul that it is God's grace alone that saves and keeps one saved. God is the highest court, and He has declared that believers are righteous. There is no higher appeal and yet the church at Corinth had rationalized their inappropriate sexual activity with a theological excuse. The Corinthian church thought since they had been declared righteous because of their faith in Christ, they could sin without consequence. There are many religious people who say the same thing today. They say, "Everything is taken care of because Christianity has made us free, so let's live it up!" Other people say, "What's the big deal about sex? It's only a biological function. We're only animals, and no one gets upset when dogs do it!" They look at their sexual freedom as if it were amoral.

2. The malice demonstrated

The Corinthian Christians lived in a city that was synonymous with illicit sex. The Greek word korinthiazesthai--to corinthianize--meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery (William Barclay, The Letters to the Corinthians [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975], pp. 2-3). The Corinthian Christians were overwhelmed with that kind of life-style. They assumed that since they were saved, it was all right to continue living a debauched life. They did not look at their sexual sin as anything serious, but simply as a biological function.

B. The Context

The Corinthians were carrying their former life-style into the church. The problem of sexual immorality was simply another problem the church at Corinth had to deal with. Paul wrote the entire epistle of 1 Corinthians to respond to each of the problems that resulted from their former life-style.

1. The folly of division--chapters 1-4

In 1 Corinthians 1-4, Paul dealt with division in the church. They were divided over human leaders and philosophy. Both of these sins were carry-overs from their former life.

2. The failure of discipline--chapter 5

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul dealt with the evil of failing to discipline sin. That was a reflection of when they were tolerant toward sin.

3. The futility of dissension--chapter 6:1-11

In 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, Paul dealt with the sin of suing fellow believers. The Corinthian society was very litigious and the church simply carried that tendency over into their Christian life.

4. The fate of decadence--chapter 6:12-20

The Corinthian believers were immoral before they came to Christ and carried that right into their Christian experience.

Paul deals with their sin of immorality in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 by taking apart their rationalization for

thinking it was all right to practice it.

LESSON

I. SEXUAL SIN HARMS THE BODY (v. 12a)

"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient."

The apostle Paul says all things are possible within the area of God's grace but that not everything is expedient. The Greek word for "expedient" is sumpherei, which means "to profit." Paul in effect is saying, "God will forgive the believer's sin, but the price is very high." Immorality is one of the things that God forgives, but there is a heavy price to pay. If you as a Christian commit immorality, God has forgiven you totally and completely by the blood of Jesus Christ, but there is much harm built into that sin. No sin is ever right or good, and no sin ever produces anything right or good. Sin is never worthwhile. In the sense that believers are free and no longer under the penalty of the law in any way, all things are lawful for them. Yet sin never brings profit; it always brings loss.

A. The Enticement of Sexual Sin

No sin that a person commits has more built-in pitfalls than sexual sin. It has broken more marriages, shattered more homes, caused more heartache and disease, and destroyed more lives than alcohol and drugs combined.

1. Proverbs 5:3-6--"The lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil, but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on sheol. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are unstable, that thou canst not know them." The saying, "What you see is what you get" is not necessarily true!

Solomon gives good advice in verses 7-9, "Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not near the door of her house, lest thou give thine honor unto others, and thy years unto the cruel." You aren't going to have a problem committing adultery if you don't go where adulterers are waiting.

When people get into compromising situations and fall, they lose their honor and self-respect.

Instead of associating with honorable people, they wind up with cruel people. Solomon also says in verse 10, "Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth and thy labors be in the house of an alien." A person could actually lose his fortune because he had been destroyed by sexual sin. Many men are saddled with paying much alimony because of their sin. People have lost their lives and livelihood to immorality. It is only when a person is old and has nothing but the pain and agony of his sin will he say, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me" (v. 12)!

2. Proverbs 5:18-19--"Let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love." Solomon isn't saying God is against all sex. Sex is a wonderful thing as long as it occurs within the guidelines of marriage. God is saying to the married couple, "Live it up!"

In verses 20-21 Solomon gives a contrast by saying, "Why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman and embrace the bosom of a foreigner? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his goings." Why would a Christian commit adultery when he knew the Lord was watching?

B. The Elimination of Sexual Sin

1. Proverbs 6:23-29--Solomon says, "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a foreign woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart, neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of an unchaste woman a man is brought to a piece of bread; and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take a fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbor's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent." God's Word is the light that will keep you away from sexual immorality. "A foreign woman" simply means anyone other

than your own wife.

As verse 26 attests, something as high and lofty as a man who is designed in the image of God is brought down to nothing but a piece of bread because of sexual immorality. Do you think you're going to commit sex sin and get away with it? You're wrong. You can't take fire in your bosom without burning your clothes (v. 27). Verse 32 ends by saying, "Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding." It is foolish to commit adultery because "he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul" (v. 32). God may forgive the Christian for committing adultery, but that doesn't make it the right or smart thing to do.

2. Proverbs 7:4-8--Solomon says, "Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister, call understanding thy kinswoman that they may keep thee from the strange woman. That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the foreigner who flattereth with her words. For at the window of my house I looked through my casement, and beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding, passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house." Wisdom will keep you from women who flatter you. Solomon gives an illustration in verse 6. He looked through his window and saw an unwise young man. The world is full of unwise men. And did you know that the old trade of prostitution hasn't changed much? Prostitutes are still on corners (v. 8). Here is an unwise man going down the street of a harlot.

He comes near her corner and "went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night" (vv. 8-9). Something like this usually occurs at night. Solomon says in Verse 10, "Behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot, and subtle of heart." You can usually tell a harlot by the way she dresses, not only in those days, but today as well. "She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house; Now is she outside, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner" (vv. 11-12). The harlot is always out stirring up trouble.

Solomon continues this scenario in verses 13-23, "She caught him and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows.

Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with embroidered works, with fine linen of Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning; let us solace ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home; he is gone on a long journey. He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield; With the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till an arrow strike through his liver--as a bird hasteneth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life." A Christian who involves himself in sexual sin will will destroy his own life.

3. Proverbs 9:17-18--Solomon cites a lewd woman as saying, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" and observes that "her guests are in the depths of sheol." There is a certain adventure in adultery but the end result is absolutely devastating.

4. 1 Corinthians 10:8--Paul said, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." 23,000 Israelites died in one day for committing adultery.

5. Psalm 51:2-3--David prayed, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." God forgave David for committing adultery with Bathsheba, but David was absolutely devastated because of his sin. He paid for that sin every waking day for the rest of his life. It destroyed his family and left him lonely because sexual sin has a way of making you lonely. It immediately isolates you because you're afraid someone might find out. David was physically sick, and had a guilty conscience that was created havoc in him the rest of his life (Ps. 31:9-10). God forgave his sin but it didn't change the consequences. David still paid a high price.

II. SEXUAL SIN CONTROLS THE BODY (v. 12b)

"All things are lawful unto me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

A. The Enslavement of Sexual Sin

The phrase "be brought under the power of" is the Greek word exousiasth[ma]lesomai, which means "to come under the domination of" or "to come under the power of" something. It literally means "to enslave." Paul is saying in verse 12, "I will not be enslaved to sexual sin." There is no more enslaving evil than sexual sin. People who bind themselves to sexual sin are always looking for full gratification, which they never find.

B. The Ending of Sexual Sin

The Corinthian Christians were becoming slaves to sexual sin under the guise of liberty. What they did not realize was that they were actually losing their freedom in Christ. In the name of Christian freedom, they had actually become slaves to their own desires.

1. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4--Paul said, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication; that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor." The context argues that "vessel" is here a synonym for body rather than for wife, as many interpreters hold. Every believer is to rightly control his own body.

2. Romans 8:13--Paul said, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Paul is saying, "Gain control of your body; master the flesh!" Many young people ask me, "How far should you go in a dating relationship?" I respond by saying, "You should never go further than when you lose control." Someone might say, "I'm always in control." If you have that kind of attitude, you had better be careful because you can get to the place where you are victimized by your passion.

3. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27--Paul also said, "[I fight] not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." In verse 27, the phrase "keep under" is the Greek word hup[ma]lopiaz[ma]o, which means "to give a black eye to," or "to beat the face black and blue." Paul in effect is saying, "I have to beat my body into subjection because even as a preacher I could become a castaway." Many people who name the name of Christ are castaways. Some have even preached about Christ, but because they didn't give their body a black eye so to speak--discipline themselves--their lusts ran away with them and they sinned, no longer useful to God. Sexual sin is a driving, compelling, dominating passion in which men are taken captive.

C. The Escalation of Sexual Sin

1. Psalm 1:1--The Psalmist said, "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." All sin has a progressive element. First, a man is walking, then standing, and finally, sitting. No sin is more progressive and enslaving than sexual sin. The more one indulges in it, the more one is controlled. Often it begins with small indiscretions, which lead to greater ones and finally to flagrant vice.

2. James 1:13-15--James said, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Sin, if it is dwelled upon, will be a continual battle.

3. 2 Timothy 3:13--Paul said, "Evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." The progressive element of sin is inevitable.

The Corinthians were no strangers to sexual sin, and unfortunately many believers indulged in the same. In the name of Christian freedom, they had become controlled by their own fleshly desires. Paul in effect, says in verse 12, "Yes, all things are lawful, but if you involve yourself in sexual sin, you will become a slave to it."

III. SEXUAL SIN PERVERTS THE BODY (vv. 13-20)

"Foods for the body, and the body for foods; but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is

not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I, then, take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he who is joined to an harlot is one body? For two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is outside the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

A. The Body Is for the Lord (vv. 13-14)

1. The biological function

Food and the belly were created by God for each other (v. 13). Their relationship is purely biological. It is likely the Corinthians were using this truth as an analogy to justify their sexual immorality. Perhaps this was a popular proverb which 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." But Paul stops them short by saying, "It is true that food and the stomach were made for each other, but it also true that they are merely temporal." One day, God is going to destroy both food and stomachs. The biological process of eating will have no place in the eternal state. The body is not for sexual sin, but is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body. Why? Because God has raised up the Lord and will also raise up our bodies by His power (v. 14).

2. The spiritual union

Someday your body will be resurrected. It isn't just a temporal commodity. Our bodies will be brought out of the grave to be glorified and transformed into heavenly bodies. Don't think that the biology of eating is equal to what you do with your body because in terms of the body's union with Christ, there is a big difference. Eating is a natural function, but sex is far more. It is a spiritual union that transcends the biological. C. S. Lewis said in The Screwtape Letters, "Wherever a man lies with a woman, there, whether they like it or not, a transcendental relation is set up between them which must be eternally enjoyed or eternally endured" ([N.Y.: MacMillan, 1959], p. 83). The Bible never says God will destroy the body eternally. The body of a Christian will spend eternity with Jesus Christ in a glorified state. Our bodies do have biological functions, but are far beyond the temporal state of food and stomach. There is only a temporal reality between the food and the stomach, but between your body and the Lord, there is an eternal relationship that must not be defiled because God wants you presented to Jesus Christ as a chaste virgin (2 Cor. 11:2). Your stomach was made for food, but your body wasn't made for sex—it is made for God. And within God's will, sex is included in marriage only. Don't defile your body, which is designed to spend eternity with Him; the body is for the Lord.

B. The Body Is a Member of Christ (vv. 15-18)

1. The extent of sexual sin

Our bodies are not only for the Lord in the future, but they are also a part of Christ's own body right now. An incomprehensible thought to Paul was that members of Christ's own body would commit sexual sin and make themselves members with a prostitute! Paul uses the strongest negative in the Greek language, M[ma]le genoito, "God forbid, or "May it never happen!" When you were saved, you were joined to Christ. Every Christian is a member of Christ's body. Christ is "head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23; cf. 1 Cor. 12: 12; Rom. 12:5). If a Christian commits acts of sexual sin, he is joining Christ to that act. It is unthinkable to join Jesus Christ and sexual sin together in a relationship! Committing sexual sin is like saying, "Lord, I am going over here to commit adultery, would You please come and join me?" That's blasphemous, but it's no more blasphemous than a Christian committing adultery because he's actually making Christ partake in a reprehensible act as a member of the body of Christ.

2. The evil of sexual sin

Sex is a union of two people becoming one flesh (Gen. 2:24). Thus, if a Christian engages in sexual sin, he is making Christ one with that sin. Sex is not just biological but also spiritual, in that two people become one flesh. That is the way God designed it. That is why the Old Testament admonishes two single people to marry if they engage in sexual sin because they have consummated a spiritual union. This is why the Bible says adultery is grounds for divorce because there has been a union consummated outside the marriage.

When you unite with a prostitute, you become one flesh with her in the deepest sense of communion within your being (v. 16). When a Christian commits adultery or when a single person is involved in sexual sin, they have been drawn into a union with that person. And you have drawn Jesus Christ into that union also. Christ is not personally tainted with that sin anymore than the sunbeam that shines on a garbage dump. But His reputation is dirtied because of the association. Verse 17 says, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." A Christian is one with Christ. How could a person ever think of drawing Him into a relationship with a prostitute?

3. The erasing of sexual sin

Paul says in verse 18, "Flee fornication." The smartest way to handle sexual sin is to run from it. You can't have a problem with sexual sin if you are not around it.

a) Genesis 39:12--Potiphar's wife "caught him [Joseph] by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got out." Joseph was an intelligent man. He was in a potential compromising situation and he got out right away. Don't say to yourself, "I'm going to stay in this tempting situation and gain the victory." That is ridiculous! If you are tempted in any way, get out of the situation!b) 2 Timothy 2:22--Paul said, "Flee also youthful lusts." If you're looking at something that could cause you to sin, stop looking! If you are in a situation that has the potential for compromising your testimony for Christ, flee that temptation. It does not matter if people don't understand your actions; flee before you are drawn into sexual sin. When we are in danger of such immorality, we should not argue, debate, or explain, and we certainly should not try to rationalize. We are not to consider it a spiritual challenge to be met, but a spiritual trap to be escaped. We should get away as fast as we can.

4. The examination of sexual sin

Paul further states in verse 18, "Every sin that a man doeth is outside the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body." Paul does not elucidate on what he means by this statement but I believe he is saying that, although sexual sin is not necessarily the worst sin, it is the most unique in its character. It rises from within the body and is bent on personal gratification. It drives like no other impulse and when fulfilled, affects the body like no other sin. It has the potential of destroying a person that no other sin has. Because sexual intimacy is the deepest uniting of two persons, its abuse corrupts on the deepest level. Sexual immorality is far more destructive than alcohol, drugs, or crime. Sexual sin is the deepest penetrating sin that a person can commit because it unites him to another person in the vileness of their sin.

Some years ago a sixteen-year-old girl came to my office in complete despair. She had committed so many sex sins that she felt utterly worthless. She had not looked in a mirror for months, because she could not stand to look at herself; and to me she looked to nearer 40 than 16. She was on the verge of suicide, not wanting to live another day. I had the special joy in leading her to Christ and seeing the transformation He made in her life. She said, "For the first time in years, I feel clean." Sexual sin destroys a person because it diametrically opposes everything God intended for the body of a Christian.

C. The Body Is a Temple of the Holy Spirit (vv. 19-20)

Paul goes on to say in verse 19, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" As Christians, the Corinthians didn't seek or earn the Holy Spirit; He was given as a gift. The Christian's body is the actual temple or dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

1. 1 Peter 1:18-19--Peter said, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver and gold, from your vain manner of life received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "Ye are bought with a price." And what was that price? The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul calls for sexual purity not only because of the way sexual sin affects the body, but also because the body it affects is not even the believer's own.
 2. 2 Corinthians 6:16--Paul said, "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Christians are the shrine of the Holy Spirit. And if that is so, how can a person draw the Holy Spirit into sexual sin?
- A friend once took a visitor to a large Roman Catholic cathedral on the East Coast. The visitor wanted to pray at the station of his favorite saint. But upon arriving at that station, he was startled to find a sign saying, "Do not worship here; closed for cleaning." Similarly the Corinthian Church had place for seeking souls to worship since they too were unclean. Paul wrote his epistle to encourage them to immediately change their behavior.
- The bodies of believers are God's temple, and a temple is for worship. Our bodies, therefore, have one supreme purpose: to glorify God (v. 20). The rest of the verse reads, "And in your spirit, which are God's." This addition does not appear in the best manuscripts, so the verse should end without it. Verse 20 is calling believers to live in a way that brings honor to God, who alone is worthy of our obedience and adoration.
- Are you defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit by engaging in sexual sin? Are you justifying your actions by saying sex is only a biological function? If you are, the Word of God commands you to stop immediately. Your body is for the Lord. As Paul told the Ephesians, "Fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (5:3).

Focusing on the Facts

1. True or false: The church at Corinth had rationalized their sexual activity to the point where they felt they could sin without consequence.
2. Describe the background of the city of Corinth.
3. Give four reasons for Paul writing to the Corinthians?
4. Sexual sin _____ the body (v. 12).
5. What sin produces more pitfalls than any other? Explain your answer.
6. What is the effect of sexual sin based on Proverbs 5:3-6?
7. What is God's attitude toward sex within marriage?
8. How can a Christian begin to eliminate sexual sin in his life? Explain your answer using Solomon's advice.
9. Sexual sin _____ the body (v. 12).
10. There were several passages given stating God's attitude toward sexual sin. What were they and explain their significance.
11. Describe in your own words the enslaving and progressive elements of sexual sin.
12. Sexual sin _____ the body (v. 13-20).
13. Discuss the point verses 13-14 are making in regard to sex and the biological function of the body.
14. What will ultimately happen to your body as a believer?
15. True or false: If a Christian commits acts of sexual sin, he is joining Christ to that act.
16. What is the smartest way to handle sexual sin?
17. Discuss the implications of the Christian's body being the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Pondering the Principles

1. In 1 Corinthians 6:12 Paul expanded the meaning of Christian liberty by saying, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." He was essentially saying, "God will forgive the believer's sin, but the price is very high." Sexual sin is a unique kind of sin in that it harms the believer's own body. It entices and enslaves the person who involves himself in it. It is every Christian's responsibility to eliminate all forms of sexual immorality in his life. Are you presently involved in sexual immorality? Are you using your body for any other reason than the glory of God? If you are, memorize 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 and ask God to make His will a part of your life.
2. Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:13-20 said, the believer's body is for the Lord, is a member of Christ's body, and is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Are you defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit by engaging in sexual sin? Are you justifying your actions by saying it is only a biological function? If you are, the Word of God commands you to stop immediately. The next time you are tempted to sin sexually, run--literally if need be--from that temptation (Gen. 39:1-15). God will give you grace to handle any temptation if you are willing to say no to sexual sin (1 Cor. 10:13). Ask God right now to help you flee from from sexual sin.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).