

**1 Corinthians 6:12-20**  
**(Ezekiel 44:4-14; John 1:14-18)**  
**“So Glorify God in Your Body”**

## **Introduction**

Paul comes now to another crucial aspect of the disruptions causing such pain and division within the Corinthian church. In every age there is an unfortunate tendency to mistake the heart of the gospel, the very reason that it is good news, and so to misunderstand what the gospel aims to do. Too often, Christians think that the key is getting the words right and the rituals right and belonging to the right group, rather than following Jesus in his radical obedience, death and resurrection. Against such thinking, Paul has already written, “For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power” (4:20).

Jesus’ call was, and still is, “Come, follow me!” When Jesus calls us and we respond to his call, two things happen: We are spiritually united to Christ and to one another, so that we represent the presence of the future, the new humanity. And what makes this possible is that we receive the promise of God: that his own Spirit, the same Spirit that filled, empowered and directed Jesus’ life, will fill, empower and direct our lives as well. The tragedy at Corinth was that, in spite all their boasting about their doctrinal wisdom and spiritual power, they were clueless and powerless, as evidenced by their pride and their divisions. As we look at our divided culture in the aftermath of the election, and long to see our nation healed, we should take responsibility as the people of God for our part in the divisions, and recognize our high calling to show the world the love of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What Paul teaches in these verses is central to a proper understanding of the gospel, and to the expression of the gospel in a transformed life. He calls us to understand the nature of freedom and not to mistake it for license to do whatever we wish, and to understand the nature of spirituality and not to disconnect it from ordinary living.

## **Body**

### **1. Understanding Christian freedom: What is permitted versus what is good (6:12):**

The Christians in Corinth have clearly taken teaching, perhaps Paul’s own teaching, and twisted it to excuse doing whatever they wish. They have said, “All things are lawful for me, since Paul teaches that we are not under law but under grace. Just as our bodies are made for food and so must be fed, so too our bodies are made for sexual pleasure and so must be satisfied.” Paul responds that they have misunderstood the nature of Christian freedom, and he makes the argument in two ways.

*All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful.*

We know that just because something is lawful or permissible doesn't mean that it is good. It is lawful to eat nothing but hamburgers, french-fries and milk shakes, but that doesn't mean that it is helpful or healthy. It is lawful to refuse medical care for easily treatable illnesses, but that doesn't mean that it is a good thing to do. It is lawful to walk away from commitments we have made, to break friendships and marriages and to cut off relationship with our children. But that doesn't mean that it is good. So simply because something is permissible does not make it right.

*All things are lawful, but some things lead to bondage*

Paul then approaches the issue from a slightly different angle. Sometimes when we exercise our freedom we find ourselves no longer free, but bound by destructive habits. No one drinks alcohol in order to become an alcoholic, but many find that they are no longer free and that their lives are tragically affected by what others may be able to enjoy and walk away from. Some of us – perhaps most of us – need to have extended periods when we turn off all our electronic devices to see whether or not we can actually spend a few hours or even a full day without breaking out in a rash obsessing over what messages we might be missing.

Of course, Paul is driving at a crucial point: Christ-followers are to be just that – those who follow Christ and do not simply do whatever they want and then afterwards consider the consequences and, perhaps, ask for forgiveness. Having established that point, he now explains in the remainder of the text why this is so very crucial.

## **2. Understanding Christian spirituality: Dualism verses sacramentalism (6:13-20):**

Sadly, many Christians, both then and now, do not understand the nature of the human body and its relationship to true spirituality. Many think that, because the body and the world we inhabit are dying, it doesn't really matter what we do with our bodies or with this good earth. What matters, they think, is simply their soul, and so long as long as their soul is saved, it doesn't really matter what they do with their body because they are saved by grace and not by works. Paul seeks to disabuse them of such a deadly and destructive misunderstanding, and to show them that spirituality is intimately connected with the use we make of our bodies, and that our bodies and the universe of which they are part are sacraments, uniquely

designed to display the glory of God. Again, he approaches the issue from two directions.

*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?*

When the Lord makes us his own, he joins us to his Son and he also joins us to one another as members of his new humanity. The language Paul uses here is, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" The incarnation did not cease when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to resume his place at the Father's right hand. It continues through his body, the church, still present in the world and entrusted with his mission of drawing all people to him and uniting all things in him.

We know from Romans chapter five that Paul sees everyone as belonging either to the old humanity in union with Adam, or as belonging to the new humanity in union with Christ. We belong to the old humanity by nature or to the new humanity by grace. Many of our theological perplexities and disagreements would be obviated if we just grasped this: it is our union with Christ that grants us all things in him. But how does this happen? How does God enable us to die with Christ and be raised in him even now as we live?

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?*

The answer is that God gives us Spirit, and the Spirit joins us to Christ in both his death on our behalf and in his resurrection victory over death. As we said earlier, the same Spirit that filled, empowered and directed Jesus' life and ministry is given to us to fill, empower and direct our lives. God no longer inhabits places, but people, and his glory no longer resides in temples made by human hands, but in human beings themselves. Thus, Paul writes, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (6:19f).

## **Conclusion**

This, quite simply, touches everything in life. There is no sacred/secular disjunction. Paul writes later in this same letter, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (10:31). This makes, in the deepest sense, everything we do an act of worship, an expression of gratitude. And to the degree that we begin to be possessed by this tremendous truth, everything changes and nothing is ever the same again. "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."