

DO YOU NOT KNOW?

PART 5

TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-20

August 12, 2012

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

In 1 Corinthians 6:9-20, Paul asks the Corinthians four questions, each beginning with, “Do you not know.”

Each of Paul’s questions function as a rebuke and rejection of the Corinthian’s justification for their sexual immorality (Note: For an excellent summary of the slogans used by the Corinthians, see Denny Burk, *Discerning Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12–20*). The problem with the Corinthians is that they didn’t know the gospel and its implications for their lives in the matter of human sexuality. Therefore, Paul seeks to reintroduce the Corinthians to the gospel and its implications, which alone has the power to motivate them to flee immorality (v. 18a) and to lead them to glorify God in their bodies (v. 20b).

First, in vv. 9-11, we saw how Paul takes up the theme of the kingdom of God and applies it to the problem of sexual immorality in the Corinthian church.

I. DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD? VV. 9-11

Paul warns that in the consummation of God’s kingdom the serially unrighteous will not be there. But, the good news is that Paul’s warning from the law in vv. 9-10 is not the final word on the matter. In an amazing and swift change, he brings his first argument to a climactic conclusion in v. 11 by reaffirming the Corinthians conversion and new status as citizens (saints) in God’s kingdom.

By directing the Corinthians forward to the consummation of God’s kingdom, Paul is seeking to drive home this point: Since unrighteousness cannot inherit God’s kingdom in the future it must not be tolerated now in the present. The ethics of the kingdom yet to come determine the morals of the kingdom that already now is.

Furthermore, by reaffirming the Corinthians new status as citizens of God’s kingdom, Paul exhorts the Corinthians (and us!) to live differently than the world precisely because God in Christ by the Holy Spirit has: (1) cleansed them from the defilement of their past sins (washed/regeneration); (2) set them apart from their former sins to belong to Him (sanctified/definitive sanctification/election); (3) forgiven them and given them a right standing with Himself (justified) and (4) granted them an inheritance (adoption as sons!).

Simply put, Paul is exhorting the Corinthians on the basis of these gospel blessings to become what they are. Next, Paul proceeds from the affirmation of v. 11 to an attack on the Corinthians' theological justification for sexual immorality in vv. 12-20 (see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 250-251). This now leads us to Paul's second argument against the Corinthians sexual immorality.

LESSON:

II. DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOUR BODIES BELONG TO CHRIST BECAUSE THEY ARE DESTINED FOR RESURRECTION? VV. 12-14

Paul writes,

“¹² ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ ‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food and God will destroy both one and the other.’ The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.”

Two words dominate Paul's arguments in vv. 12-20: “sexual immorality” and “body” (see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 250). As we will come to see, due to a radically flawed understanding of Christian freedom, some of the Corinthians maintained they were free to do anything with their bodies in regards to sexuality. Paul, therefore, wants the Corinthians to reflect on a gospel-centered view of the body and freedom in order to flee sexual immorality (v. 18a) and to glorify God in their bodies (v. 20b).

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 is one of the most important theological passages in the NT about the importance of the body. Paul also presents a complete ethic of Christian freedom in embryonic form (i.e., when the gospel is central one can refute license without becoming legalistic (cf. Wilson, *1 Corinthians*, p. 252).

By appealing to the gospel and its implications, Paul argues that our bodies belong to Christ and thus we are not free to do anything we want to do. The resurrection validates the moral importance of the body and demonstrates that it has a glorious destiny rather than destruction. It is this gospel-centered reality that motivates the believer to flee sexual immorality (v. 18a) and to glorify God in his or her body (v. 20b). So we see that Paul issues the command to flee sexual immorality and to glorify God but he grounds them in the truth of the gospel (the imperative always flows out of the indicative, never the reverse).

The Corinthians, under the pretense of wisdom, arrogantly claimed that the body was temporary and unimportant. As a result, they concluded it made no difference what they did with their bodies because physical matters have no lasting significance. The only thing that matters is the spiritual realm. Note carefully: the fallen heart of man will always seek some way to justify immoral behavior.

Moreover, we learn from this text that immoral living flows from theological error. The Corinthian's faulty theology is reflected in the slogans they were advocating and living by (cf. vv. 12-13, 18; Note: The slogans represent real voices within the Corinthian church, see Burk, *Discerning Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20*, p. 110).

Some suggest that the Corinthians had drawn upon the philosophical tradition of the Stoic ideas about freedom (e.g., the works of Epictetus; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, p. 101; see also p. 102; see Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, p. 263). Whatever the precise background, some of the Corinthians used these slogans to express their radical understanding of Christian freedom in Christ in order to justify their immoral behavior. In response, Paul enters into a dialogue with the Corinthians to confront and correct their false theology, (Note: This is actually the first time in his letter that Paul quotes and corrects the Corinthians flawed theological position.).

This brings up another important point of application. Packer and Parrett write, "When the church teaches doctrines or permits patterns of living that are out of plumb with reference to the Gospel, much damage occurs," (*Grounded in the Gospel*, p. 119). This is certainly evidenced here in the Corinthian church. False teaching not only distorts the truth and sows the seeds that lead to heresy but it also leads to unholy living (Ibid, p. 119). Such unholy living mars the church's witness to the world, making it more difficult for the world to hear, believe and enjoy the gospel. In Titus 2:10, Paul calls on believers to live in such a way that "makes the teaching of the gospel attractive." Paul then confronts and corrects the Corinthians who were failing to live according to the truth of the gospel.

In vv. 12-13, Paul is making a very tight argument against the Corinthian's erroneous views about the human body, which they have brought in alongside their false views on Christian freedom (see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 253). The two Corinthian slogans in vv. 12-13 present a false view of freedom and a false view of the body.

A. A FALSE VIEW OF FREEDOM, v. 12

One of the favorite slogans of the Corinthians was, "All things are lawful for me," (Note: Paul repeats it again in 10:23). By this slogan, they argued that they had the "right/authority/freedom to act" as they pleased without restraint in matters relating to sexuality (i.e., "I am free to do anything," cf. Thiselton, *1 Cor.* p. 461; Hays, *1 Cor.* p. 101).

As we previously pointed out, there was a crisis of authority in the Corinthian church. The Corinthians were arrogantly opposed to Paul and his sound teaching that accords with the gospel. Their pursuit of self-gratification and self-indulgent, sexual conduct was founded upon their faulty theological justification for their so-called "right" to engage in sexual immorality (most likely temple prostitution). Paul corrects the Corinthian's false view of Christian freedom by offering two counter slogans of his own.

(Note: Paul is not addressing matters of indifference—*adiaphora*, i.e., nonessentials such as food, drink, days, ceremonies, etc... Rather, Paul is addressing matters of the law and Christian ethics, viz. moral absolutes.).

First, in response to the slogan, “All things are lawful for me,” Paul responds, “but not all things are helpful.” In the context, Paul has in mind sexual sin.

The word “helpful” is the Greek word “συμφέρω,” which means “to be advantageous, help, confer a benefit, be profitable/useful,” (*BDAG*, p. 960). Paul’s point is that living by the philosophy, “I am free to engage in unrestrained sexual behavior since it doesn’t matter what I do in my body,” is exceedingly unhelpful. Self-indulgent, sexual license doesn’t contribute to my good or the good of the covenant community—the church. No sin is advantageous, helpful, profitable or beneficial (cf. 6:9-10). And, to be sure unrestrained sexual license is exceedingly disadvantageous, unhelpful, unprofitable and detrimental to oneself and others.

The Scriptures clearly set forth the destructive effects of King David’s sin. His moral failures adversely impacted his family for generations. Proverbs 5 and 6 vividly set forth the destructive effects of sexual sin. Proverbs 6:26-31 warns that succumbing to sexual temptation leads to disaster—in fact committing adultery is fatal. Proverbs 6:32-34 warns, “³² He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. ³³ He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away. ³⁴ For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge.”

The barrage of sexual “freedom” within our culture promoted by the Internet, television, movies, magazines, music, etc... has had devastating physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual consequences. It has led to broken marriages, increase of divorce, shattered homes, diseases, etc... Sexual sin leaves men and women crippled with shame and guilt. It makes a person feel defiled and dirty. It leads to crushing emotions of guilt and a constant accusing conscience, which produces suffocating loads of regret. In short, like Paul in Corinth, we live in a sex-obsessed society that suffers from the incredible devastating and destructive effects caused by sexual sin.

Paul then responds by stating that the real question of Christian freedom in regard to sexuality is not whether an individual is free to do anything he or she chooses. Rather, the real question of Christian freedom is whether such behavior is helpful to oneself (see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 252). Paul also repeats this slogan in 10:23 and joins it with the idea of “building up” (οἰκοδομέω) within the community.

Christian conduct that properly accords with the gospel (i.e., resurrection) is not based on the faulty philosophy, “I” have the “right” to do whatever I choose” (freedom of choice!). Rather, Christian conduct that properly accords with the gospel first asks, “Is my conduct spiritually beneficial to myself and to others? Does it build up or tear down spiritually?”

Paul was the apostle and champion of Christian freedom among the Gentiles. Some Bible teachers suggest that the Corinthians radical view of Christian freedom may have been based on a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching (cf. 9:1, 9; see Hays, *1 Corinthians*, p. 101). It is indeed true that Paul taught that believers are free from the Mosaic Law as a *covenant for life*—this was never its purpose, cf. Gal. 3:17-21) However, Paul never taught that believers were free from the moral law of God as a *rule of life*. Paul always qualified the Christian's freedom as "in Christ." One is free to act, provided one's actions are grounded "in Christ" and guided by the law rather than by fleshly, self-indulgence. Samuel Bolton writes, "Christ has freed us from the manner of our obedience but not from the matter of our obedience (*The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, p. 72).

We must always remember that Christian freedom is not a license to indulge the sinful desires of the flesh, as Paul reminded the Galatians, "...you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another," (Gal. 5:13).

Second, Paul replies to this licentious argument by stating that Christian freedom must not become a means of bondage. The Corinthians asserted, "All things are lawful," but Paul replies, "I will not be dominated by anything." Christian freedom is not intended to lead to enslavement to anything or anyone one.

Again, Paul is referring to sexual sin. There is hardly a more enslaving sin than sexual sin. Sexual sin is all-consuming. It is like the Lay's potato chip slogan, "Betcha can't eat just one." The more you indulge in sexual license the more control it has over your life.

As the champion of Christian freedom, Paul was free to live in the grace of Christ. However, he refused to allow his freedom to be an occasion to be enslaved to any sin. You can be sure, Christ and the transforming power of the gospel will dominate you or you will be dominated by the fallen passions and desires of your flesh.

For Paul, he would not allow himself to be mastered by anything but Christ! Talk about gospel centrality! In this context (vv. 12-14), Paul filled his horizons with the resurrection and its moral implications for one's daily life. How often does the slogan, "I will not be mastered by anything but Christ!" influence your daily life?

When we are seeking to live a self-consciously gospel-centered life we will not want to be dominated by anything or anyone but Christ! This gospel-driven slogan was the all-controlling reality of Paul's life when it came to sexual sin.

The Corinthians failed to understand how harmful and damaging unrestrained sexual license is to everyone involved. And they failed to understand how unrestrained sexual license gains control of and dominates those who indulge in it.

Next, Paul confronts and corrects the Corinthians false view of the body.

B. A FALSE VIEW OF THE BODY, v. 13

The second slogan the Corinthians advocated to justify their sexual license was, “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other.” This slogan represented the Corinthian’s belief in the moral irrelevance of the body.

The Corinthians reasoned, “Just as food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, so the body is meant for sexual activity and sexual activity for the body. Since God will one day destroy the body, it doesn’t matter what we do with our bodies. Our behavior is of no moral consequence.”

It seems the Corinthians were influenced by Greek philosophy, which held to body/soul or material/immaterial dualism. Greek dualism scorned the physical world for the “higher” knowledge and wisdom of “spiritual” existence (see Burk, p. 114, fn. 32). Such an erroneous philosophy explains why the Corinthians possessed a defective view of the body. It also helps to understand how immorality and the resurrection of the body were dismissed as of little importance in the Christian life (cf. 6:13; all of ch. 15).

Because the Corinthians were influenced by their culture rather than the gospel, they wrongfully reasoned that the acts of the body had no eternal significance or value. Therefore, Paul responds by stating a basic fact of a gospel-centered life, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (v. 13b; Note the comparison Paul makes in v. 13, “food for stomach/stomach for food” vs. “body for the Lord/the Lord for the body”).

The reason believers cannot live by the philosophy, “I am free to do anything in regard to sexuality,” and the reason why the believer’s body and behavior does matter is because his or her body belongs to the Lord (Paul will develop this idea further in vv. 15-20).

This leads to v. 14. Having confronted and corrected the false views Christian freedom and the body in vv. 12-13, Paul will now set forth a gospel-centered (Christian) view of the body in v. 14.

C. A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE BODY, v. 14

Paul writes, “And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.” In v. 14, Paul confirms the basic truth he asserts in v. 13. He gives a Christian—gospel-centered—view of the body. Namely, resurrection confirms the fact that the believer’s body belongs to the Lord and not sexual immorality. Because the body belongs to the Lord, the ultimate end of the believer’s body is not destruction (v. 13a) but rather resurrection (v. 14).

The gospel teaches that the believer's body has a glorious destiny! Apparently, many Corinthian Christians thought that salvation did not involve the body (cf. Ben Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth*, p. 164, fn. 11). But, Paul emphatically states that salvation involves the material and immaterial part of man—salvation involves the whole person not just the soul. Christ lived, died and rose again to save not just our “souls” but also our “bodies. In fact, our salvation is the salvation of the whole of creation itself (cf. 1 Cor. 6:14; Rom. 8:18-23).

All who are presently a citizen of God's kingdom now (v. 11) are moving toward the consummation of God's kingdom in the future (v. 14)! Our destiny is a new heavens and a new earth—resurrection—where the righteous will dwell forever and ever in a physical, bodily existence (Rev. 21:1-4). Richard Hays writes,

The body belongs to the Lord Jesus, and God has confirmed His concern for the body by raising the Lord Jesus; this act of power declares God's ultimate promise to raise us also (cf. Rom. 8:11 and 1 Corinthians 15 in its entirety). No one who understands the fundamental content of the *kerygma* can suppose that our bodies are irrelevant. The body is not simply a husk to be cast off in the next life; the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims that we are to be redeemed body, soul and spirit (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23-24; Rom. 8:23). Salvation can never be understood as escape from the physical world or as the flight of the soul to heaven. Rather, the resurrection of the body is an integral element of the Christian story. Those who live within that story, then, should understand that what they do with their bodies in the present time is a matter of urgent concern (*1 Corinthians*, p. 104).

Paul's emphasis on the resurrection of the body should forever silence the implicit dualism that is so often passed off as Christian (see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 256-257). Take for example, the well-known “gospel” song, “This World is not My Home.” The song begins,

This world is not my home I'm just a passing through;
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door;
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

There is no gospel in this song. It is not espousing a Christian view of the physical world like Paul sets forth here in 1 Corinthians 6. Rather, rather this song is an example of how an implicit Greek dualism has infected Christian thought. It expresses a Greek view of the world that places little to no value on the physical, created world that God pronounced as “very good” (cf. Gen. 1:31). The belief that the spirit is immortal but the body along with the rest of creation is destined for destruction is a totally pagan view (cf. v. 13a; cf. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 257).

Too many believers have been influenced by an implicit dualism illustrated in this well-known “gospel” song. As a result, they have some kind of notion that when they

die they are going to be in some kind of ethereal place where they exist in some kind of disembodied state (“somewhere beyond the blue...”). And so many wonder, “Am I going to be a human being, a spirit, etc...what am I going to be?”

In contrast, the Christian view confesses, “I believe...in the resurrection of the body” (Apostles Creed). The Heidelberg Catechism in Question 57 asks, “What comfort does the resurrection of the body offer you?” Here’s the answer, “A. Not only shall my soul after this life immediately be taken up to Christ, my Head, but also this my flesh, raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul and made like Christ's glorious body.”

So, to answer the question of believers who wonder, due to the influence of pagan philosophy rather than the gospel, “What will I be like?” The answer, according to the gospel, is you will be like Jesus! Your soul and body will be reunited and made like Christ's glorious body! This is the hope of the gospel!

Now, how does all of this apply to one's daily life of sanctification and the battle against sexual immorality? How does this understanding of the resurrection help you when you are sitting in front of your computer warring in your spirit, “Should I click or not click?”

Here is the answer. Because so many believers have been influenced by an implicit, Greek dualism, they can't get their arms around such an ethereal state. Therefore, they don't long for resurrection and the end result is that they don't grow in their sanctification. But, when the resurrection (i.e., gospel) remains central in our thinking, this gospel truth purifies us and moves us along in our daily sanctification. Listen to John in 1 John 3:2-3, “² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.” Placing our hope in our future resurrection has a purifying affect in our present sanctification.

Why? The reason is because we are continually reminded that our bodies belong to the Lord and are destined for a glorious future with Him! We are continually and powerfully reminded that our bodies do not belong to sexual immorality. Such continual self-conscious gospel centeredness has a powerful purifying affect on our daily lives.

In addition, there is a sense in which the believer is already spiritually resurrected, which is signified and sealed in baptism. In Colossians 2:12, Paul writes that believers have already “...been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” Paul makes a similar argument in Romans 6:4, “We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Again, Paul is simply arguing on the basis of “Be who you are.” Because you have already been raised with Christ spiritually, His resurrection power is already at work in your life. The believer has been raised to walk in newness of life (to live as citizens of God’s kingdom rather than as outsiders who are excluded from God’s kingdom, cf. 6:9-11). Therefore, we are called to walk in newness of life precisely because we can!

We must not think of the body and the physical world as that which is to be rejected, subdued, or indulged because it is of no significance for—or is even a hindrance to—“real salvation,” which has to do with the “soul.” By raising Christ from the dead, God confirms the importance the human body and His physical creation, which He pronounced very good in creation (cf. Gen. 1:31). Later in chapter 15, Paul devotes the entire chapter to the doctrine of resurrection where he expounds in full the certainty of bodily resurrection. But here in the context of chapter 6, Paul appeals to this hope of bodily resurrection in order to confront the bodily sin of sexual immorality and motivate believers to glorify God with their bodies.

Far from the belief that the physical body is morally irrelevant and has no place in Christ’s redemptive work in the present age or in the age to come, Paul emphatically asserts the resurrection of the believer’s body. The bodily resurrection of the believer proves that the body is not meant for sexual immorality. Rather, the body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body, which is confirmed in the fact that He will raise it up on the last day. The final resurrection validates the moral importance of what one does in his or her body. The application is obvious: Set your hope fully on the resurrection and this will lead to purity of life.

There is one final question regarding the resurrection, “How will it come about?” Look at Paul’s assuring words at the end of v. 14, “...God raised the Lord and will also raise us up *by His power*” (emphasis mine). The believer’s resurrection will be effected by God’s power. The resurrection is the greatest demonstration of God’s power (cf. Rom. 1:4; 2 Cor. 13:4; Eph. 1:19; Phil. 3:10). Nowhere is our need for God’s service more vividly made apparent than in resurrection. Paul’s reference to God’s power emphasizes the fact that the believer’s resurrection results from the gracious power of God rather than the natural ability of man (cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 232).

Further, note how Paul ties the believer’s resurrection to Christ’s resurrection (Paul makes the same argument in chapter 15). Just as the Father raised Christ from the dead even so He will raise us also by His power. By virtue of our union with Christ, His destiny is also our destiny. Because Christ was raised the believer’s body is also destined to be raised by God’s power. Paul writes in Philippians 3:20-21, “²⁰...the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.”

The resurrection of the believer then is precisely what gives meaning, responsibility and significance to his or her bodily existence in the present. Again, we see how

Paul's eschatology plays a controlling factor in the believer's daily life (cf. vv. 9-11 where Paul appeals to the consummation of the kingdom of God, for details see, *Do You Not Know, Part 4*). Gordon Fee writes, "The final consummation looks for a new heaven and a new earth; and in that new order the body is raised so that God's people will experience the final wholeness that God intended" (*1 Corinthians*, p. 257).

REFLECTION:

Let's take a moment to reflect on the powerful motivating influence of the good news Paul has taught us in vv. 12-15a.

Your body is not your own. It belongs to the Lord because it is destined for resurrection. Therefore, you are not free to selfishly indulge in unrestrained sexual license. Your behavior has important moral significance and consequences. Christ is the Lord of your body and ruler of His kingdom. Because you are now a citizen of His kingdom, you now have a new identity and you now live according to a new sexual ethic and are bound for a new eternal destiny. Therefore, in light of this gospel truth, you are called to live according to this new standard of kingdom righteousness rather than persisting in worldly unrighteousness, which characterized your previous life when you were excluded from the kingdom of God (cf. vv. 9-11).

The reason for the Corinthian's faulty view of the body and Christian freedom was because they didn't know the gospel and its implications for their lives. Once again we see that the gospel is what is at stake and not simply the resolution of an ethical question (see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 251). The gospel (specifically the resurrection) has direct ethical implications for the way Christians are to walk, conduct themselves, and live their lives. Thus, the gospel and its implications for the Christian life need to be continually rediscovered and relearned by believers. For "...the Gospel is to serve as the plumb line for all our thinking, speaking, teaching, and living," (J.I. Packer & Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, p. 119-121).

As we prepare for the Lord's Supper, let us consider briefly how Paul's teaching here in 1 Corinthians 6 relates to the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper Christ comes to serve us at His table—the Divine Service. We gather together first in order to receive. The church is the theater of grace where God works on behalf of undeserving sinners. Nowhere is our need for God's service more vividly made apparent than in resurrection. As we have learned, it is God's power—His gracious and miraculous intervention—that effects our resurrection. And it is the Lord's Supper that assures us of our future bodily resurrection. So, as we come to the Lord's Table today, let us come with a heart of faith and gratitude to receive assurance that our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself (cf. Philip. 3:20-21).

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