

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Title: Excuses for Sin

Truth: Paul addresses two excuses that Christians use to justify their sin.

Date/Location: Sunday May 31, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

We have just studied 6:9-11 regarding how the sins of the world will prevent the unbeliever from inheriting the kingdom of God. The Corinthian Christians had been washed and set apart from those sins. The result was intended by God to be such that they would not live any longer in those sins. They were justified—constituted as righteous and treated as such by God—and so were separated from those sins.

They could have explained away their present sins on the basis of that good news. For example, perhaps they thought that God will forgive all kinds of sins, so it doesn't matter if I do those sins. Perhaps sins which relate to the "physical" part of a person can be indulged without getting in too much trouble with the Lord. They had a couple of slogans that served to assuage their consciences about this.

Perhaps you have experienced the phenomenon of the flesh working with the mind in order to justify your behaviors. "Well, it's just the physical body." Or, "I'm just flesh, after all." Or, God will forgive me. Or, "It's not really a sin, is it?" What Paul says next will be very relevant to you.

I. Slogans as Excuses for Sin, v. 12-14

A. "All things are lawful for me." Some translate this as "everything is permissible" or "I have the right to do anything."

1. If you read it as Paul saying this phrase, "All things are lawful for me [Paul]" then you will immediately find yourself in a conundrum. Is it in fact true that *all things* are lawful for Paul now, that he can do anything without repercussion? Does he view himself as not under any law at all? (Chapter 9 will answer that question in the negative.) Does he think that because he is not under the Law of Moses as his rule of life that he can do anything that he couldn't do before? (No, because the church was settled on the fact that things strangled, and blood, and sexual immorality were not permitted for Christians—among many other things) This kind of extra-legal attitude does not fit Paul's mindset.

2. So it must be that he is quoting a common saying of the Corinthians. It is best to read it that way, as if it has quotation marks around it and

perhaps is preceded by “You say, ‘all things are lawful for me.’ But I tell you that all things are not helpful.” So this is an incorrect proverb.

3. How shall we understand it? It is the word of Corinthians looking for a justification for their sin. “All things are lawful for me.” They think they can be involved in behavior—even some of the behaviors listed in 6:9-10—without consequence. Romans 6:1-2 mentions this idea and records Paul’s horrified response.
4. Paul responds with what is the real truth: all those things are not helpful (profitable) and he will not be brought under the power of any of those things. You have to ask yourself **not** whether you can get away with something, but whether it is profitable or it is addictive; whether it builds up tears down; whether it helps or hurts. The answers to those questions will guide you as to whether that thing, whatever it is, is something you should be involved with. Sometimes the answer is trivially easy. Other times it is harder and requires more discernment. Other times we deceive ourselves into thinking it is hard when it is not.
5. Examples: alcohol: it is potentially addicting and it definitely brings you under the influence/control of something else. Drugs are not as clearly spoken about in the Bible as alcohol, but they fit under the same exact category as alcohol. We need not multiply examples. The point is that making excuse for sin is not what Christians desire to do. We want to do things that are helpful. And we certainly do not want to live under the enslaving **power** of sin. We were its slaves once, and we don’t need to and must not volunteer to put ourselves back into that state again.

6. 1 Cor. 10:23 repeats this slogan:

“All things are lawful for me.” ← but not all things are helpful.

“All things are lawful for me.” ← but not all things edify.

Notice what is taught here: it is not that everything is permissible to you to do. God is not interested in you pleasing yourself or merely keeping some law as a legalistic matter of self-righteous performance. He is interested in things that are helpful to you and others, and that edify you and others. Verse 24 of chapter 10 brings that out: we are not to focus on seeking our own benefit, but each one the other’s well-being.

B. “Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it [the stomach] and them [the foods].” There is some debate as to

how long the quotation extends—either to “foods” or to “them.” I take the latter, because it appears that Paul responds to the first part in verse 13b, and he replies to the second part in 14b.

1. This slogan conveys the idea that there are physical processes which are isolated unto themselves and are irrelevant in one’s spiritual life. In the case of literal food, it goes into the stomach and is processed and the waste part is eliminated (Mark 7:18-19). The (false) claim is that this has no bearing on the spiritual life. This is obviously wrong because food can become a sinful matter, an addicting thing, a power over your life. And you have to decide to master it, lest it masters you. See Titus 1:2 for a condemnation of laziness and gluttony.
2. This is an expression of a larger philosophy that is connected to Platonic Dualism. The idea is that there is a distinction between matter and spirit, or body and soul. This is incorrect when compared against Biblical theology; but it can be “used” to justify the idea that material matters do not affect the spirit. This idea is then convenient to justify sin. “It’s just food.” Or, “It’s just a physical process like sexual intercourse...what’s the big deal?” And lest you think I made a big jump from food to sexual matters, that is just what the Corinthians were doing. They were using the food proverb to cover a wide range of sins. Look at verse 13b: “the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord.” The body is not merely a material thing to be used in this world for worldly purposes. It is to be used *for the Lord*. And our God is concerned for the body, as evidenced by His creation of it, His provision for its sustenance through food and good things, His care of it in death, His resurrection of it, and the fact that Jesus Himself came in and continues to live in a material body.
3. “God will destroy the stomach and the foods.” Because of the ultimate destination of these things, the Corinthians wrongly argue, it doesn’t matter what you do with them. Much to the contrary! It is *because* of our eternal destination in the kingdom of Christ and in heaven beyond that we are to live as sons of light, as future kingdom citizens in the now, as righteous and Spirit-filled.
4. And besides, it is not the case that God will destroy food and the stomach. Verse 14 reminds us that God raised the Lord up *bodily* and He will do the same for all Christians. This means that the ultimate destination of the stomach is not destruction. Jesus has a stomach, and he used it after his resurrection to eat (Luke 24:41-43, John 21:5-

13). And there will be food in heaven, at least from the tree of life which bears fruit monthly (Rev. 22:2).

C. Paul has listed their two slogans and knocked them down soundly.

Redemption concerns the entire person: body and spirit, the entire living being (soul) of the person is involved. God calls you to love and serve Him with mind and heart, soul and will, body and spirit: everything.

II. Careful Consideration of Sexual Immorality, v. 15-18

- A. The Corinthians' attitude about immorality was cavalier. They were not grieved about the man who lived in sin in chapter 5. They were making excuses for more the same kind of activity in their lives with the philosophies they embraced. But Paul will explain that our connection to Christ demands holiness.
- B. The Christian's body is a part of "Christ." This means that we are part of Christ's body, which is the Biblical metaphor for the church. We are not a replacement "physical body" for Christ, but we are a corporate group of people that are connected by union to Christ and are His representatives on earth.
- C. That being the case, Paul asks a rhetorical question: should we take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Absolutely not! The point is that sexual intimacy creates a union between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24, Matt 19:5). Outside of marriage, that union is incompatible with our union with Jesus. We cannot be connected in that holy way to Jesus *and at the same time* in that unholy way with another person.
- D. Therefore, we must FLEE sexual immorality. Whether physical or "virtual" we have to run away from it.
- E. The sin of sexual immorality is somewhat different than other sins, Paul teaches. "Every (other) sin is outside the body." But sexual immorality, because of the union principle above, has a special effect on the persons doing the sin, so that it is not just like "eating and eliminating." It is a sin against not only the other person, your spouse, your God, but also YOU yourself. It has lasting effects. It is addicting. It affects a place in your mind and heart that other activities do not.

III. Our Bodies are Tools to Glorify God, v. 19-20

- A. Individually we are temples. We do not "own" ourselves. We serve another. I expressed this idea of "individual" temple-hood because in chapter 3:16 you will recall that the church as a whole is a temple of the

Holy Spirit. But notice that Paul says *your body* is a temple of the Spirit. So yes, you have to use your *body* well for the Lord. You cannot neglect it, you cannot indulge it, you must treat it like it is—a dwelling place of God. It is how you express your life, and as a Christian, you must express life in a Christian fashion.

- B. The Spirit you have is a gift from God. Treat it as such.
- C. We were bought in redemption at a steep price. Therefore, we do not own ourselves. We cannot do stuff just to please ourselves.
- D. Therefore we must honor God *in both body and spirit, which belong to God*. He redeemed the whole of each Christian, “lock, stock, and barrel.”
 - 1. That phrase means “everything.” It originates with the notion of a long gun like a shotgun or rifle. Think of a single-shot rifle of the revolutionary war era. If you have the lock (which is the firing mechanism), and the stock (the wood part that rests on your shoulder), and the barrel for the bullet to pass through, then you have all that you need to make your gun function.
 - 2. So it is in the Christian life—you cannot live without your body, nor without your spirit. You need both parts to make a functional human being. You must make both parts work together to live the whole Christian life. You cannot use one part for sin and the other part for righteousness, because they are inextricably entwined. (Actually the only thing that can truly disconnect them from each other is death. But even *that* is a temporary state.)
- E. When you do that, you glorify God. You show that He is worthy of your all, that He is worthy because He redeemed you, saved you, sanctified you, washed you, justified you, indwells you, provides for you, sustains you, and carries you through trials.

Conclusion

We all tend to make excuses for our sin. Ultimately, those excuses are all just as weak as the ones the Corinthians used. Throw them aside and live for Christ. Put your whole body into it—your soul, your energy, your efforts, your diligence, your planning, everything.

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