

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

¹² “All things are permitted for me”—but not all things are beneficial. “All things are permitted for me”—but I will not allow anything to control me. ¹³ “Foods are for the belly, and the belly is for foods, but God will do away with both of them.” However, the body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴ God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then remove the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For it says, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.

Sermon for Epiphany 2, January 17, 2021 St. Paul’s Green Garden, MI

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Theme: “Redeemed Children of God Want to Stay Pure”

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed,

“This room looks like a pig sty!” Every parent has said it and every child has heard it. If you can’t remember it, I’m sure every mother can remember. Or perhaps when we were young, after an afternoon in the sandbox or out playing with friends, a parent said, you look like pigs. Getting dirty on the outside seems to be a common denominator of active children everywhere.

When I was in college we lived in a small town in the farm country of eastern Wisconsin. On one of the back country roads we used to drive there was a hog farmer who probably raised a couple dozen hogs each year. One summer afternoon we drove past that farm just after a thunderstorm had moved through and the sun was beginning to come out again. The storm had washed all the pigs quite clean before they had made it back to the barn. By the time we drove past, the pigs were happily trotting out of the barn, eager to get back to their mud holes just as quickly as they could. That is normal for pigs.

But that is not how we are to live our lives, by going back to the mudhole of sin. God did not create us to live morally filthy lives. He created the first humans to be absolutely holy. And even though we muddied and smeared ourselves and gave up our place in his family, he has bought us back from slavery to sin. Our Lord wants us to remain pure in every thought that crosses our mind, in every action our hands and feet perform, in every word that crosses our lips, and in every message toward which we bend an ear.

Just so that we understand the kind of purity God wants from us and how we can remain pure, we will listen to the words God gave to St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 6. There our Lord's message is simple: "Redeemed Children of God Want to Remain Pure."

We all like freedom don't we? We crave it, we think we deserve it, our country was founded on it. And believe it or not, God wants us to have freedom. He did not intend that his commandments should enslave us. And as God's redeemed children, who wear the robe of Christ's righteousness, we are living in freedom when we obey God's commands. The writer of Psalm 119 had this to say about God's commands: "**I will walk about in freedom for I have sought out your precepts.**" Those do not sound like the words of a slave do they?

Since he bought us back from slavery to our sins, and death and the power the devil had over us, we are free. But Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that their freedom was not permission to sin. "**All things are permitted for me**"—but not all things are beneficial. "**All things are permitted for me**"—but I will not allow anything to control me." So in our actions in all our conduct we will follow God's principles of love as he gives them to us in all his commandments.

The Corinthians seem to have had the idea that what a person does with his or her body does not affect your inner, spiritual life. But that just is not so. "**Foods are for the belly, and the belly is for foods**, may have been a saying among the Corinthians. It may have meant that the stomach and food have nothing to do with our spiritual life. But it still does not mean that we have freedom to over eat, under-eat or abuse the bodies God has given us. We simply cannot say, "**It's my body I can do with it what I like.**"

That truth carries over to how we treat the sexuality God has given us. God has created us man or woman, boy or girl. God gave us our bodies. Every cell and every system in our bodies belongs to him. Paul reminds us, "**By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.**"

Our society, our culture in this country is, in many ways like the city of Corinth. In that particular city, sins against God's gift of sex were an everyday occurrence. So in our culture and country, it seems almost impossible to walk into the grocery store, open a magazine of any kind, watch a movie or go anywhere without someone trumpeting in words or pictures or both that it is OK to use your sexuality the way you please. And we are simply mistaken if we think those messages do not affect us.

Satan doesn't engage in nerve gas warfare. He doesn't try to change our attitudes by trying to change us all at once. He uses poison darts that seem so small that we don't think they will do any damage. But when we see a picture, or read words that arouse sinful desires Satan has already gained ground in his battle for our souls.

Satan wants to enslave us in sins, that's what sin is—slavery, no matter what commandment you are talking about. Our Lord, through Christ's death and resurrection has given us freedom. Real freedom is in obedience to God's commands. Listen again to the psalmist: "**I will walk about in freedom for I have sought out your precepts.**"

These are the words of someone who is free—someone who belongs to Christ. Each one of you also belong to Christ. You and I are members of his body.

How did you become a member of his body? It happened because of Jesus. He bought you with the price of his own blood. He offered his own perfect, holy life to his Father, into death to satisfy the Father's perfect justice. You became a member of Christ's body because Jesus was willing to go to death in our place. Then, on top of that you and I couldn't even come to faith in God's promises by our own power. He sent us the Holy Spirit to cause us to be reborn spiritually. Our rebirth by God's power makes us members of Christ's body.

Since that is true, Paul then says, "**Shall I then remove the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Certainly not!**" We might think of Paul's words this way: suppose you have two cars. One is bright red, it has a beautiful paste wax shine. I mean, this car is so shiny you can see yourself in the polish on the fender. The whitewalls on the tires almost glow. But then there's the other car.

This car is beat up. The fenders and hood that were once shiny are now dull, chipped and full of dried, caked on mud. The antenna is broken; the rear bumper is loose and dented; the front bumper is missing entirely. Now imagine someone comes along and says, "**I know how I can make that old car look a little better.**" So he takes the beautiful, chrome front bumper off the shiny new looking car and bolts it in place on the beat up, dirty looking car. Before long what do you think that bumper would look like? Wouldn't it also start to rust from neglect and get chipped from carelessly bumping parking stall guard rails and other objects?

So do you understand what Paul is saying here? Why would one who is a holy, clean, purified child of God want to make him or herself filthy with sexual sins? When we misuse our sexuality we are misusing a gift of God. On top of that those kinds of sins make us part of the filth and dirt of the sinful world that has no part of Christ and his body. Paul makes it very clear that when we sin sexually we sin against our own bodies.

So, maybe you are thinking, well, here's a loophole. I can still look at magazines and pictures and read steamy romance novels because it doesn't involve my body. But don't you know that those things only inflame sinful desire? James gives us a warning: "**But each person is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desire. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.**"

Is it any wonder that Paul says in verse 18, "**Flee from sexual immorality.**" The word he uses means to run away from something that intends to harm you. None of us would think of hanging around a dangerous animal whether domestic or wild. It is important that we see sin, any kind of sin as being far more dangerous because it involves our souls.

The truth is, because you belong to Christ you don't have to give in to sin. You don't have to attach yourself to sin any more. Paul reminds us in Galatians 2: "**The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave**

himself for me.” The author of Hebrews says, **“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal.”** When you remember what Jesus did to lay down his life for you on the cross and rescue you from the evil and punishment of your sins, there is no reason to go back to sin. What Jesus did for you is the best reason you will ever have to live your life in the way that pleases God.

When Jesus bought you and me back from slavery to sin, he did it for two reasons. Not only did he want to rescue you from hell. He wanted us to be his redeemed children who would do his will. He bought us to serve him.

Paul says that you and I are temples of the Holy Spirit. Once the Spirit causes you to believe that Jesus is your Savior he keeps living in you. That means he is there, within your heart to strengthen and build up your new self. Since the Holy Spirit is living in you, you don't want to make your body filthy with sin. That is quite wrong. Just as wrong as making this church building dirty or filthy. This is the place where we worship God. We wouldn't think of dumping coffee grounds on the chancel steps or leaving a trail of orange rinds and banana peels down the center isle.

Suppose you bought a house where the paint was peeling off the siding, some of the windows were broken and the inside was trashed. The carpet was torn. The previous owners had had wild parties and hadn't cleaned up very well. But after you bought it you went to work and scraped and painted the outside, you replaced the carpet, painted the inside walls and replaced the broken windows. It didn't look like the same house. It was literally a whole new house. But then suppose the former owners came and said, “Say, I would like to buy the house back from you.” And just to show you how little they thought of your efforts they said, “We will offer you the same as what you paid for it.” Obviously such an offer is ridiculous. You wouldn't even consider it. For one thing, the risk of having the beautiful clean house ruined would be too great.

So after the Holy Spirit has made us clean and caused us to be reborn, why would we want to invite Satan and his clan to take up residence and make things filthy with sin all over again? Jesus' blood cleanses us from sin. The Holy Spirit lives in us and keeps fanning the flame of our faith with God's Word and the sacraments. You are free from sin.

So now use your freedom to serve Christ in the joy of forgiveness. Paul says, **“you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.”** In matters regarding our sexuality God reminds those who are married to remain faithful to their marriage partners. Those who are unmarried, God wants you to remain pure and wait for the gift of marriage as the proper outlet for sexual desire. Any time you seek to do God's will you might be ridiculed and mocked. But remember, you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. When you keep his temple clean you are honoring God. You are also a powerful witness to others who watch your actions. That might be your own children. It might be friends at school or at work.

If people ridicule and scorn you for not giving in to sexual sins, remember, those who disobey God are dishonoring themselves and God. When you obey God you give

him the honor he deserves. He has redeemed you from the corruption and filthiness of sin. He has cleansed you when you could not cleanse yourself, including giving you forgiveness of sins with no cost to you. The Holy Spirit living in you gives you the reason and the power to live every day in every way so that you give honor to your God who loves you. Amen.