1 Corinthians 6: 12-20 Daniel E. Hoffman, DMin, STS

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12“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are beneficial. “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 meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, “The two shall be one flesh.” 17But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?20For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

**BACKGROUND:** Corinth in the first century of the Common Era was a wide- open port city at the intersection of Mediterranean naval and Roman land trade routes. The city was multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious. This diversity brought with it a broad set of expectations, behaviors, practices and lifestyles all of which found their niche in the city of Corinth with little if any restriction. Paul, apparently aware of the cities ways here advises the young Christian church in Corinth about their own behaviors, expectations, behaviors and practices, calling for a discipline that bears witness to their faith in the midst of a culture of apparent faithlessness.

**VERSE BY VERSE:**

VS 12 – All things permitted - will become the watchword, motto of the gnostic Christians in Corinth because nothing done in the body is of consequence. Is this a slogan in the current congregation? This can be sourced to gnostic texts in the second century, yet Paul’s cautionary note appears to show an awareness of the attitude existing and endangering faithful Christian living. The phrase may also have some roots in stoicism for whom freedom is the result of an inner withdrawal from the world finding later expression in outward acts, as opposed to the Christian freedom that is freedom from the world as the result of Christ’s service.

Permitted me – While our modern ears here this as a call for communal standards in discipleship versus individual choices as being all of equal validity, Paul may be here challenging the attitude of welcome to a more Jewish standard of laws. This anti-Judiazing polemic represents an ongoing discussion in the primitive church.

Not all things are expedient – Christianity is not about obedience to rules but upon the free gracious activity of God who accepts even rule breakers out of love. What is inexpedient is not what keeps us from being saved but that which becomes destructive to society, community, “the ruin of many a poor boy”.

Not enslaved by any – There is a word play here between “exesti-lawful” and “exousias thesomai – not be enslaved” This points to an act of losing ones freedom because one has dared to exercise it. The expression of freedom is to purposeful and lifegiving for both the individual and the community.

VS 13 – Paul here applies in passing two rules to two realms Food (oilia=belly) and body (soma-flesh).

Food for stomach, stomach for food – Another saying/slogan? While the images of the Kingdom feast may be familiar the Kingdom is not a matter of food and drink. (Rom 14:17) For these Christians Kosher laws no longer govern their life together, neither do the rules of their previous gentile living rather their life in community is governed by knowing and living together in ways that reflect Christ’s Lordship as head of the body.

Body not for fornication/immorality but the Lord -since the Jewish Law no longer directs our actions, is any/every action right and acceptable? OR are we bound to the body of the Christian community, subject to fellow disciples who together are subject to Jesus as head of the body, Lord of the church? BODY SOMA is more than mere animal flesh (Sarx) but flesh with soul, personhood lived within community, being that is not merely conscious but purposeful, moral, accountable to the creator, responsible, HENCE the Christian needs to see and sense our life in the body (individually and communally), being directed by the one who became flesh for us and our salvation

VS 14 God raised, will also raise – We have here what some hear as a mere parenthetical grounding of Paul’s discussion. In resurrection. Theology. Others hear a connection that points from the previous mention of the body’s intent as being tied to the body’s eternal rather than mere temporal existence. “The live hard, die young leave a good looking corpse” is the opposite of what might be said to a Christian version of “Live long, and prosper eternally”. What can of course be pondered here is the connection between the Resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of Christian disciples. While the text is FAR from a complete and systematic consideration, it does at least pose the question.

VS 15 members of Christ/members with prostitute – Picking up on the foregoing mentions of the body, its dissolution and resurrection Paul is here considering the intimacy of a disciples/churches relationship with Christ, using the most intimate relationship human beings experience in sexual union. Perhaps we need not consider the sexuality of our discipleship, but rather recall Jesus response to the challenge regarding the woman with many husbands and the question “in the resurrection whose wife shall she be?” ( Mk 12:23/Matt 23:28/Lk 20:28) as a cautionary prolepsis of a far great intimacy than we now know, being opened to us in our resurrection membership/bond with Christ. CLEARLY Paul is pointing disciples and the church toward an understanding of union with Christ that is far more than a mere spiritual bond. Again, is this an affront to the nascent gnostic spirit present in Corinth at this time?

VS 16 Do you not know – places the following in the realm of common shared experience/knowledge. This is not “known” by spiritual wisdom, intellectual rigor, divine revelation etc….It does not take a rocket scientist to KNOW..

Join to prostitute/two become one – The words from (Genesis/Mark 10: 8-10) form the basis of most wedding vows and even among non-believers are common parlance. Here they become a watchword for the kinds of bonds we make by choice. Do we unite ourselves to Christ or to worldly deceptions? This is a fundamental ethical question for Christian disciples and should be in the forefront of our minds with every choice we make, every word we speak, every action we consider. There is thus a rather stark contrast between what we all know, and what we NEED TO KNOW in order to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. (Is this natural law vs Gospel Promise/call?)

VS 17 United to the Lord/One in Spirit with Him – United (Kollomenos) is quite literally a physical joining of male and female in intercourse building on the imagery of the previous verse. What is experienced in the sexual union even with a prostitute is akin to our unity with the divine. It is a strong bond, knowing and being known, mysterious, connective beyond the duration of the act and potentially procreative – all good and apt expectations for a disciple’s union with the divine spirit. One might ponder how bachelor Paul shares such knowledge, but that of course is speculative.

VS 18 Shun Immorality/Flee fornincation – An exhortation directly connected to the previous verse. (Some think this should be part of Vs 17) Recognize that this not an easy task for a Christian living in Corinth, prostitution/temptations abound at every street corner.

Sins outside the body/against the body – This is a primary text for our modern understanding that SEXUAL sins are far greater than other minor sins like theft, lies, murder and the like. For Luther SIN = SIN = SIN and all SIN is failure to fear, trust and love God above all other. If Paul is using “body” here to indicate not the individual believers body alone, but rather the individual believer within the body of the church we have a whole new perspective that takes us out of the realm of sexuality, and puts us into the realm of community. The body language is now about what effects the community of the church, sins within by its members do not merely effect the individual but the whole body, and sins without as assaults from non-members need to be identified and dealt with for the sake of the body. How do we deal with such, in light of God’s call to faithfulness, and Christ’s promise of mercy?? This is the question of discipleship, a far broader consideration than mere sexual morality!

VS 19 Body a Temple/Holy Spirit within you – Temple here is not the building but the dwelling place of the dine, in order to become accessible to humanity. Again if Paul uses Body for community, his calling is not for any individual to see themselves or their body as the divine presence in the world (A definition of Hubris) but the community of the church as the dwelling place of God, the Spirit being present in our interactions, common life together, shared ministry and mission, our love toward one another and the world. The better punctuation for this verse is to have the question Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit within you, which you have from God? Followed by the declarative “You are not your own.” Again giving credence to the interpretation of the more communal understanding of “body.”

VS 20 bought with a price / glorify God – This really flows from the following “You are not your own” making the connection that the Christian belongs to God and is not his/her own master. Without engaging in the economics of Anselmian atonement theory, humanity is created and restored to be servants of God, living in true freedom finds us living together under the reign of Christ and giving glory to God by both abstaining from those things that take us away from God (via negative/prostitutes etc) and fully engaging in those things that draw us toward God (via positive/prayer praise, thanksgiving, loving service etc).

**THEOLOGY:** True faith sets us free to discover and live out a new obedience of love that is lived within the imperfect yet always necessary community of believers we call church, yet God knows to be the living body of his risen Son Jesus the Christ.

Paul means that if we are free to choose, then we should remain free and not become a slave to any particular desire. Anyone who orders his desires properly remains the master of them, but once he goes beyond this limit he loses control and becomes their slave. John Chrysostom

In the Platonic view, the body is a prison; in that of Paul, it is a temple of God because it is in Christ. Tertullian. “On the Soul”

Note that Paul did not say that we should hate immorality, but that we should shun it as people who are aware of the perniciousness of evil. Theodoret of Cyr “Commentary on 1st Cor.”