

# 1 CORINTHIANS 6:13

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. We're approaching the end of the second major section of this letter, which covers chapters 5–6. The main focus in these chapters is on the theme of church purity. That's what we saw in chapter 5, where Paul rebuked the Corinthian believers for tolerating a man who was committing incest with his stepmother. They needed to remove this man from the church to maintain their purity and hopefully motivate him to repent. Then in the beginning of chapter 6 Paul dealt with the sin of Christians taking each other to civil court. Instead of taking their disputes before the unrighteous, they should have found a wise believer to serve as an arbitrator. Otherwise they would have ruined their testimony before the world.

Then at the end of chapter 6 Paul returned to the theme of sexual immorality and more specifically the sin of prostitution. Last week we began looking at the second half of this chapter, which starts in verse 12. Look at what Paul wrote in this verse: "Everything is permissible for me, but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me,' but I will not be mastered by anything." In this verse Paul gave us two sentences, and each one has two parts. The first part in each sentence is exactly the same, and then it's followed by a contrast in both cases. So Paul made the same observation twice and then used the word "but" to contradict it in two different ways. And what he said in this observation was that "everything is permissible for me."

The Greek word for permissible usually just refers to what is lawful or legal. In fact, several translations have the word "lawful" here, like the English Standard Version and the Legacy Standard Bible. But normally this word does not refer to what is lawful according to the governing authorities. Instead it refers to what is lawful under the Old Testament law. For example, in Matthew 22:17 the religious leaders tried to trap Jesus by asking him, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Now obviously it was absolutely legal under Roman law to pay taxes to Caesar. In fact, it would have been illegal not to pay taxes! So clearly the religious leaders were talking about whether it was lawful in God's sight to pay taxes to Caesar. And Jesus answered by essentially saying yes.

But we know that some things were not lawful in God's sight. There were many actions that were forbidden in God's law for the Israelites. If we just look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, we can see that they weren't to murder, commit adultery, or steal. So it's definitely shocking to see Paul's repeated statement in 1 Corinthians 6:12. He said twice that everything was permissible or lawful for him. And yet it seems impossible that Paul would have made this statement. But Bible scholars have overcome this problem by proposing a clever solution. They have suggested that Paul was actually quoting a flawed

statement that the Corinthians believers made. That's why many Bible translations put quotation marks around this repeated statement in verse 12. And one of them is the Christian Standard Bible.

But how did the Corinthian believers come up with this statement? Some Bible scholars think that they were taking Paul's theology of Christian freedom and running wild with it. In 2 Corinthians 3:17 he said that "the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." In Galatians 5:1 he said that "for freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery." But in these passages Paul was talking about freedom from the law of Moses. In Galatians 5 Paul went on to talk about getting circumcised and trying to be justified by the law. In verse 13 he said, "For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love."

So Paul certainly stressed that we're not obligated to obey the law of Moses. In Romans 6:14 he said that we "are not under the law but under grace." But this doesn't mean that we're not under any kind of law. Paul warned us in Galatians 5:13 not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. So there are still many sins that we need to avoid. Now we're under the law of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 9:21 Paul said, "I am not without God's law but under the law of Christ." In Galatians 6:2 he said, "Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." The law of Christ consists of the commands that he gave directly to his followers as well as the commands that he gave through his apostles as they led the early church and wrote Scripture.

Now certainly these New Testament commands are rooted in the Old Testament, and so there's overlap between the law of Moses and the law of Christ. For example, homosexuality is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments. And nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament. But we don't have to obey the Sabbath day command anymore according to Colossians 2:16. And Jesus declared all foods clean in Mark 7:19, so we're not under the food laws anymore. We also don't have to offer animal sacrifices anymore because Jesus offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. So we don't need the training wheels on our bike like the Israelites had. But we still need to keep the two main tires on our bike if we're going to ride the Christian life and be pleasing to God.

And apparently the Corinthian believers did not maintain this important balance. All the wheels had come off their bike so to speak. They thought that since they weren't under the law of Moses, they could live however they pleased and do whatever they wanted. And most likely they were being influenced by false teaching that what we do with our body doesn't matter. Paul dealt more specifically with that issue in the rest of 1 Corinthians 6. But here in verse 12 he offered two preliminary responses to this misunderstanding of Christian freedom. His first response was that "not everything is beneficial." The Greek word for beneficial just refers to what's useful or profitable. Paul used this word again in chapter 12 and verse 7, where he said that "a manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good." There our Greek word is translated "common good." It just refers to what is beneficial or profitable.

But in that verse Paul was not talking about what is beneficial for the individual. Instead he was saying that God gives us spiritual gifts so that we can benefit others. And I think he was teaching something

similar in chapter 6 and verse 12. He was saying that not everything we could do is beneficial to others. And this is a very helpful way to think about our actions and our attitudes. There are many things we could do that would make us feel good and bring us pleasure. But we need to follow Paul's instructions in Philippians 2:3. He said there that we should "do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves." In 1 Corinthians 16:14 Paul said that we should "do everything in love," and in chapter 13 and verse 5 he said that love "is not self-seeking." We need to do what's best for people around us.

Now some people would argue that as long as two adults both want to do something, then we shouldn't call it sin. That's a common argument against the view that all homosexual behavior is sin or that going to a prostitute is wrong. These people argue that as long as you have two consenting adults, they can do whatever they want in private. But this is a misunderstanding of what it means for something to be beneficial. The fact that something brings two people pleasure doesn't mean that it's beneficial. We need to define what is beneficial based on God's Word instead of our feelings. If we're committing sin with another person, then we're basically bringing divine judgment on that person.

But what about sins that we commit all by ourselves? Well, Paul's second response in 1 Corinthians 6:12 is helpful in this regard. He said, "I will not be mastered by anything." Paul used an emphatic first person singular pronoun here to shift the focus from others to himself. Now Paul certainly didn't want to be mastered by sin. We used to be slaves of sin before we got saved, and we should not return to that slavery. But Paul may have been thinking about something even more specific here. In just a few verses later in 1 Corinthians 7:4, he used this same Greek word for mastered to say that spouses have the right over each other's body. But if we have sexual relations with someone who's not our spouse, then we're basically giving that person authority over our body instead. We're under the mastery of that person, at least whenever we indulge in sin with that person.

But as Christians we shouldn't be mastered by anything or anyone. The only exception is of course the Lord. Paul didn't mention that fact in 1 Corinthians 6:12 because it's obvious. So true Christian freedom doesn't mean that we can do whatever we want. It means that we're slaves of God and therefore slaves of righteousness. That's what Paul taught in Romans 6:16–22. We only have freedom to do whatever we want as long as we're staying within the circle of God's revealed will for our lives. Now certainly if we're married, our spouse has authority over our body. But we need to understand that all human authority is delegated by God, who's our ultimate master. And so we can't obey any human who has authority over us if we'd be disobeying God. In these cases Peter said in Acts 5:29 that "we must obey God rather than people." We need to make sure that we're always living in obedience to the Lord.

Now let's move on to 1 Corinthians 6:13. We're ready to cover some new material. Look at what Paul wrote in this verse: "Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will do away with both of them. However, the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." Notice that we have another quotation here in the Christian Standard Bible. The same thing is true in the English Standard Bible, the NET Bible, the New International Version, and the New Living Translation. The translators of these Bible versions are telling us that they think Paul was quoting the Corinthian be-

lievers once again, just like he did back in verse 12. And what we're going to see is that these translations are probably correct.

So let's take a closer look at this quoted statement. It has two parts that are connected by the word "and." The first part of the statement is that food is for the stomach, and then the second part is that the stomach is for food. The Christian Standard Bible doesn't have a verb in the second part of the statement, but I added one because it's implied. That's actually what the translators did with the first part of the statement. In the Greek text there aren't any verbs here in this statement at all, but the verb of being was often omitted in Greek when it was obviously intended. So the second part of this statement is the reverse of the first part. The first part basically says that the purpose of food is to be eaten and digested in our stomachs. Then the second part basically says that the purpose of the stomach is to digest food. In other words, food and the stomach go together; they're designed for each other. And so we shouldn't be afraid to eat and enjoy food.

Now I don't think there's a problem with this statement, and I don't see any evidence in this passage that Paul disagreed with it. In 1 Timothy 4:3 Paul described some false teachers and said that "they forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth." Then Paul said in verse 4 that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." So Paul believed that we can eat anything we want to eat. But we should be careful not to love food more than we love God. In Philippians 3:19 Paul talked about the enemies of Christ and said that "their god is their stomach." Some people love food so much that they have very little self-control at the dinner table. So they overeat and become gluttons. Proverbs 23:21 warns us that "the glutton will become poor," and Proverbs 28:7 tells us that "a companion of gluttons humiliates his father."

So the Bible teaches clearly enough that gluttony is a sin. It's true that God made food and our stomachs for each other, but ultimately he created them for his glory. We need to make sure that we please him even in the way that we eat. Gluttony leads to poor health, and we're going to have a hard time serving the Lord effectively if we're in poor health. But in 1 Corinthians 6:13 Paul's response to the quoted statement about food and the stomach goes in a different direction. He said that "God will do away with both of them." The Greek verb here just refers to bringing something to an end so that it no longer exists. So apparently Paul was saying that one day in the future God will get rid of food and our stomachs, and we won't be eating anymore.

But I can't find any evidence in Scripture that we're ever going to stop eating for good. In fact, what I see in Scripture is quite the opposite. Listen to what Jesus told his disciples in Luke 22:29–30: "I bestow on you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom. And you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." So when we're reigning with Jesus in his kingdom, we're going to be eating and drinking. At that point we will have our resurrected bodies. In Philippians 3:21 Paul said that Jesus "will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body." But we know that Jesus ate food after he rose from the dead. Luke 24:42–43 tell us that he ate a piece of broiled fish in the presence of his disciples.

So I really don't think Paul was teaching in 1 Corinthians 6:13 that God is going to get rid of food and our stomachs in the future. It's much more likely that this statement is still part of the quotation. Ancient Greek didn't have quotation marks, so we have to rely completely on the context to help us spot quotations and figure out how long they are. And in this case the evidence seems clear that the quotation includes this statement. That's how the NET Bible and the New International Version handle this verse. So the Corinthian believers were the ones who believed that God would do away with food and the stomach. But they were wrong. Now at first glance their error doesn't seem like much of a problem. After all, they were still basically correct about food and the stomach being for each other. So what's the big deal here?

The problem is that the Corinthian believers didn't just think that our stomachs are going to disappear. Apparently they thought that our entire body will one day be no more. Now certainly we're going to die someday if Jesus doesn't come back first. But some of the Corinthian believers didn't believe that we will be raised from the dead. In chapter 15 and verse 12 Paul said, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, 'There is no resurrection of the dead?'" So Paul returned to this issue in chapter 15 and addressed it at length. But Paul's main focus here in chapter 6 and verse 13 is on sexual immorality. Look at how he ended this verse: "However, the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

So here's the logic that the Corinthian believers seemed to be using. Our stomachs are going to be gone for good one day, and so it doesn't matter what we do with our stomachs right now. We can eat whatever we want and have as much as we want. And the same thing is true for the rest of our body, including our sexual organs. If our body as a whole is going to die and never come back to life, then we can do whatever we want with our body right now. We can have sex anytime with anyone we want. So the Corinthian believers were basically putting the appetite for food and the desire for sex on the same level. They thought that we can satisfy both of them however we please. In ancient Greek philosophy it was commonly held that the body and all other material things were evil and would be destroyed. So some people concluded that what we do with our bodies doesn't matter. And this view had apparently gained a foothold in the Corinthian church.

But Scripture teaches that God created everything, including our bodies. And everything that God made was very good, at least before sin entered the world. So there's nothing inherently evil about our bodies or any other material thing. Our bodies have eternal value because God made them, and once we're raised from the dead, we're going to have our bodies for all eternity. So what we do with our body matters profoundly. And in the rest of chapter 6 Paul went on to explore this theme in more detail. But for today let's focus on what he said in verse 12 when he responded to the quote from the Corinthian believers. He said that "the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord."

The Greek word for sexual immorality is used 25 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote 10 of them. We've already seen it twice in this letter, and both occurrences are in chapter 5 and verse 1. In that verse Paul wrote, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated among the Gentiles—a man is sleeping with his father's wife." So in that verse Paul was talking about incest, but he used a term that can refer to any kind of sexual sin,

whether it's adultery, incest, prostitution, or homosexuality. We saw a different word that comes from the same root used in the three lists of sin that Paul gave us in chapter 5 and verses 10–11 and then chapter 6 and verse 9. And in all three lists Paul put this term first in the list for emphasis. Sexual immorality was a big problem in the city of Corinth, and the Corinthian believers were struggling to remain sexually pure. Paul addressed this problem in chapter 5, and then he returned to it here at the end of chapter 6.

And what Paul said here in verse 13 is that “the body is not for sexual immorality.” In other words, God didn't create our bodies so that we can enjoy sex however we want. Sexual intimacy is certainly a good gift from God, just like food is. But in each case there are some limitations on how we enjoy these gifts. We can eat any food we want as long as we're thankful to God for it. But we should not allow our stomach to become an idol. We need to guard against overeating and becoming gluttons. Now the situation is a little different with sexual intimacy. With food we can eat anything we want, but we can enjoy sex with only one person of the opposite gender. And first we need to make a lifelong commitment to that person in marriage. But once we're married, we can have as much sex with our spouse as we want as long as it doesn't become an idol. God should always remain first in our lives.

And that's why Paul said in verse 13 that “the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord.” God did not create our bodies primarily so that we could enjoy food or sex or any other physical pleasure. Instead he made our bodies for his glory, and so our focus should be on pleasing him with our bodies. In Romans 12:1 Paul wrote, “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.” God showed us mercy when he saved us from the punishment of our sins. And so our response should be to please God every day with how we use our bodies.

But how do we please God with our bodies? Paul answered that question earlier in the Book of Romans. Listen to what he wrote in chapter 6 and verses 12–13: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.” So if we're going to please God with our body, we need to keep sin from ruling over us. We're tempted every day with the desire to commit various sins. But we need to resist those evil desires. If we say “yes” to them, then our body parts will become weapons for unrighteousness. Sin will use our body parts to attack us and wound us spiritually. But if we say “no” to those sinful desires, then we'll be able to offer our body parts to God as weapons for righteousness. We'll be able to use our bodies in God's service and do righteous deeds that please him.

So the battle against sin starts in the heart with our desires. In Matthew 15:19 Jesus said, “From the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander.” And in Matthew 5:28 Jesus focused special attention on sexual immorality. He said that “everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” So if we're going to use our body for the Lord and not for sexual immorality, then we need to focus on our heart. We need to make sure that we're pleasing God in our thoughts and desires. We need to submit every area of our lives to him, including both our bodies and our hearts.

And that's why Paul used the word "Lord" here in 1 Corinthians 6:13. We just saw this word in verse 11, where it was a reference to Jesus. And most likely Paul was still thinking about Jesus here in verse 13. He was reminding us that Jesus is our Lord and master. He's in charge of our lives, and we must submit to his authority. We can't receive Jesus as our Savior without also recognizing him as our Lord. Now our natural tendency is to rebel against authority. We don't like being told what to do with our lives. And sometimes that resistance is understandable, because human authorities don't have our best interests at heart. They want to exploit us for their own advantage. They want to raise our taxes and take our money so that they can have it for themselves.

But we don't need to be afraid that God is going to exploit us or mistreat us. He loves us and wants what's best for us. That's why Paul ended verse 13 by saying that the Lord is for the body. There is no verb in the Christian Standard Bible or the Greek text, but the verb of being is understood here, just like it was earlier in the verse. Now this statement doesn't mean that God exists for the purpose of bringing our bodies pleasure. God has always existed, and he didn't create us because there was something lacking in him. He didn't create us because he needed someone to please. He didn't even need to create us so that we would please him. God was fully satisfied in himself before he made us.

But now that God has made us, we need to give him glory as our creator. We need to submit to him and live in a way that pleases him. But God's authority over our lives is for our benefit. He's not a cruel master but a loving master. He gave us our bodies so that we could enjoy a variety of physical pleasures. God's not against pleasure, but we need to enjoy it within the boundaries that he has set in his Word. And ultimately the Lord is for the body in the sense that he's going to raise our bodies from the dead. We will continue to enjoy physical pleasure for all eternity. But we won't have to worry about experiencing any more suffering or pain. And we won't have to fight against sin once we're raised from the dead. We'll get to enjoy living in our new and improved bodies for all eternity. Let's close in prayer and thank God for this incredible blessing.