

1 CORINTHIANS 6:20

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. We've almost reached 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 and more specifically sexual 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 excommunicate this man to maintain the purity of the church. Now at the beginning of chapter 6 Paul dealt with the sin of Christians taking each other to civil court. But then at the end of the chapter he returned to the topic of sexual immorality. The Corinthian believers were struggling with the sin of prostitution, and in verses 12–20 he addressed this issue head on.

But Paul started this passage by taking an interesting approach. In verse 12 he gave two quotations from the Corinthian believers that are exactly the same. Some of these people thought that everything was permissible for them. They thought that they could live however they wanted. But this view is a misunderstanding of Christian freedom. And Paul responded by saying that not everything is beneficial. We need to humble ourselves and do what's best for others according to God's Word. But Paul also responded by saying that he would not be mastered by anything. When God saved us, he set us free from slavery to sin and made us slaves of righteousness and ultimately God. So we shouldn't let sin gain any kind of foothold in our lives.

Then in verse 13 Paul quoted the Corinthian believers once again. Some of them liked to say that food was for the stomach and the stomach was for food. And most likely the next statement should be included in the quotation as well. They also said that God would do away with food and the stomach. But Scripture teaches clearly that we're going to be eating and drinking during the future reign of Jesus on earth. And so the Corinthian believers were incorrect here. But the bigger problem is that they didn't just think that our stomachs are going to disappear. Apparently they thought that our entire body will be gone for good one day. So they concluded that what we do with our bodies doesn't matter, especially in matters of sexuality. That's why Paul responded to the quotation by saying that "the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord." God made our bodies for his glory, and so we need to follow his instructions about sexual intimacy.

But Paul ended verse 13 by turning his statement around; he said that the Lord is for the body. His authority over our lives is for our benefit. And I think verse 14 reveals the primary benefit that Paul was thinking about. He said that "God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." Our bodies are not going to disappear completely after we die. Instead God is going to raise our bodies from the

dead, just like he raised Jesus from the dead. And the reason we can believe this promise is that God is all-powerful. He can do anything as long as it's consistent with his character. So we don't need to be afraid of death or grieve excessively when our fellow Christians die. Instead we should look forward to the return of Christ when our bodies will be transformed.

Then in verse 15 Paul asked the Corinthian believers two questions. First he asked them, "Don't you know that your bodies are a part of Christ's body?" Our physical bodies are not irrelevant; they're part of who we are. And since we belong to Christ's body, the church, so do our physical bodies. He's the head of the church, and so our bodies are under his authority. Then in the second question Paul asked, "So should I take a part of Christ's body and make it part of a prostitute?" Here we can see that Paul was focused on a specific type of sexual sin in this passage. He was talking about someone who engages in sexual relations for hire. Prostitution is a severe violation of God's instructions about sex being limited to marriage. It's impossible for a prostitute to have an exclusive long-term commitment in the area of sexual intimacy. You can't hold the occupation of prostitution and be a Christian, because it involves living in continual sin.

So it's no surprise that Paul answered his second question in verse 15 with a very strong negative response: "Absolutely not!" Paul was showing us just how terrible it is for people who are part of Christ's body to make their own body part of a prostitute. And in verse 16 Paul talked more about what it means to make your body part of a prostitute. He said, "Don't you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her?" So Paul asked another question here, and he was talking about the physical unity that takes place during sexual intercourse. There's a sense in which two separate bodies become one body at that time because of their close connection. They are joined together and become united.

And Paul defended his observation here by giving us a quotation from Genesis 2:24. He wrote, "For Scripture says, The two will become one flesh." Now the word "flesh" there isn't just talking about a sexual relationship. It's talking about a family relationship and the creation of a new family unit. That's why the beginning of Genesis 2:24 says that a man leaves his father and mother when he bonds with his wife. Marriage involves much more than sexual intimacy. It also includes a deep mental, emotional, and spiritual connection. But of course Paul was thinking primarily of sexual intimacy when he quoted this verse in 1 Corinthians 6:16. And I think his point was that sex with a prostitute is a perversion of God's good plan for sex. We shouldn't settle for casual sex with a prostitute or anyone else. God designed sexual intimacy to be more enjoyable if it's part of a deeper bond in marriage.

Then in verse 17 Paul said that "anyone joined to the Lord is one spirit with him." We shouldn't join ourselves to a prostitute because we've already joined ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a special connection to Jesus because of his death and resurrection to pay for our sins. And I think the word "spirit" here is probably a reference to the Holy Spirit. The way that we're joined to Jesus is through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. We're part of the body of Christ because the Spirit put us there when God saved us. Because of our unity with Jesus through the Spirit, we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing. But this privilege comes with the responsibility of submitting to Jesus as Lord in every area of our lives, including our sexuality.

So in verse 18 Paul gave a short but powerful command: “Flee sexual immorality!” There are times when the danger of sexual immorality is so close that we need to run away from it. That’s what happened to Joseph with Potiphar’s wife in Genesis 39. Sexual immorality is a very dangerous sin, and in the rest of verse 18 Paul talked about why we need to run away from it. He said that “every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body.” Now certainly there are other sins that are directed primarily against our body, like drunkenness and gluttony. But sexual immorality is different because it involves being joined physically to someone who’s off limits. And so this union is in direct competition with our union with Christ. It’s a direct violation of our relationship with Jesus.

Then in verse 19 Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that their body was a temple of the Holy Spirit. The point of this image is that the Holy Spirit lives in every individual believer. God the Father and God the Son sent him to us after Jesus ascended to heaven. And one of the reasons that God gave us the Spirit was to help us grow in holiness. But many of the Corinthian believers were fighting against the Spirit’s sanctifying work in their lives. They were the temple of the Holy Spirit, but they were going to pagan temples to have sex with prostitutes! They needed to understand that their bodies didn’t belong to themselves but to God.

And that’s why Paul reminded these people at the end of verse 19 that they were not their own. We are not autonomous and free to do whatever we want. The Holy Spirit lives in us to rule over us. We must submit to God’s authority in every area of our lives, including what we do with our bodies. After all, God owns us and has the right to tell us what we can and can’t do. And verse 20 talks more about God’s ownership of us. We’re ready to look at some new material now. Look at how Paul finished this section and this chapter in 1 Corinthians 6:20: “For you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.” This verse starts with the word “for,” which introduces an explanation for why we’re not autonomous. We’re not our own because we were bought at a price.

The Greek word for bought is used 30 times in the New Testament, but Paul wrote only three of them, and all of them are found in this letter. In chapter 7 and verse 23 he said the same thing: “You were bought at a price.” But then in chapter 7 and verse 30 he said that Christians should be like “those who buy as though they didn’t own anything.” So in that verse Paul was using the word literally with the idea of acquiring things in exchange for money. And this meaning is very common in the Gospels. For example, in Mark 6 Jesus was teaching a large crowd of people. But in verse 36 the disciples asked Jesus to “send them away so that they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat.” In Mark 16 after Jesus died and was buried, we see in verse 1 that “when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they could go and anoint him.” So in both of these verses the Greek word for buy is being used literally.

And of course we’re very familiar with the concept of buying something. The process has certainly changed over time, but the concept is still the same. Back in those days money was made out of metal, and we still use coins a little bit today. But we mostly use paper or plastic now. We either pay with cash or use a credit or debit card to buy things. And with credit and debit cards the payments are made electroni-

cally. But we're still acquiring something in exchange for money, whether it's food, gas, or clothes. However, when Paul talked about making a purchase in 1 Corinthians 6:20, he was talking about the purchase of people. He said, "You were bought at a price." He wasn't saying that the Corinthian believers were buying something. He said that they were bought. He used a verb in the passive voice, which just means that the subject is receiving the action instead of doing the action.

So Paul's point here is that someone else bought the Corinthian believers. And what he was talking about was the concept of slavery. A slave is simply someone who is owned by another person. We read about slaves in the Bible going all the way back to the book of Genesis. In chapter 16 and verse 1 we can see that Abraham had a slave named Hagar. In chapter 29 and verse 24 we can see that "Laban gave his slave Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her slave." Then in chapter 29 and verse 29 "Laban gave his slave Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her slave." Laban gave these slaves to his daughters when they were married to Jacob. In chapter 37 we can even see that Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his brothers. So even in Genesis we learn a lot about slavery. And what we can see is that it was not an ideal situation to be in. That's why Paul said these words to slaves in 1 Corinthians 7:21: "If you can become free, by all means take the opportunity." It was better to be free than to be a slave.

But there were different ways of becoming a slave. Most of the slaves in our nation's history were kidnapped and forced into slavery. And the Bible clearly teaches that this is wrong. In Exodus 21:16 God said, "Whoever kidnaps a person must be put to death, whether he sells him or the person is found in his possession." But voluntary slavery is not inherently wrong. The Old Testament law regulates this practice but does not condemn it. People could volunteer to be a slave if they ran into financial hardship and couldn't afford to survive. Then their master would provide for their needs and keep them safe. And at some point the slave could choose to leave or to remain a slave permanently.

Now we don't have an exact parallel to voluntary slavery today in our culture. But the practice of joining the military is actually pretty close. Many people join the armed forces because they can't afford to go to college. So the government provides for their education if they volunteer to serve in the military for a certain length of time. And when they're in the armed forces, their rights are severely restricted. They have more freedom than a slave, but not much. So I think we can understand the concept of voluntary slavery. It's obviously not an ideal situation to be in, but it's not necessarily wrong. I think people are overreacting when they say that all slavery is wrong. That view is just not taught in Scripture. And unfortunately it has led Bible translators to remove the concept of slavery from many passages in Scripture because they're afraid of offending people.

For example, in Romans 1 Paul started his letter in verse 1 by calling himself "a servant of Christ Jesus." But the Greek word for servant there just means "slave." That's the word found in the old Holman Christian Standard Bible, which is the Christian Standard Bible was called before 2017. But then in 2017 the word was changed from "slave" to "servant," which is not very accurate. Now thankfully there are a few Bible translations out there that are more accurate in this area. The Legacy Standard Bible and the NET Bible both have the word "slave" in Romans 1:1. But most translations shy away from using that word, and so they fail to communicate what Paul meant. He was saying that he was owned by Jesus.

And of course Paul wasn't the only person who was owned by Jesus. In Romans 6:22 he said that his readers had also become enslaved to God. Thankfully the Christian Standard Bible and most other translations have accurately preserved the language of slavery in that verse. Paul was saying that the believers in Rome were slaves of God, and by extension we can conclude that all Christians are God's slaves. What this means is that we're no longer slaves of sin. In John 8:34 Jesus said that "everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin." But we're set free from slavery to sin when God saves us. Listen to what Paul said in Romans 6:17–18: "But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over, and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness."

Now Paul wasn't saying that Christians have two masters: God and righteousness. What he was saying is that we're slaves to righteousness as part of our slavery to God. After all, righteousness is defined by God's character and his commands to us. When we obey God as his slaves, we're acting righteously. We're doing what's right in his sight. And that's the opposite of what it means to be a slave of sin. Before God saved us, we were sinning all the time. We couldn't help it; we were just obeying our master whether we realized it or not. But when God saved us, he set us free from slavery to sin. Now we don't have to sin anymore. We all still choose to sin from time to time, but now we're slaves of righteousness instead. Our lives are characterized by righteous behavior instead of sinful behavior.

So this is what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 6:20 when he said that we were bought at a price. He didn't clearly communicate who bought us in this verse because he used a verb in the passive voice. But I think it's obvious that he was talking about God here. He was implying that God was the one who bought us. But what is this price that he was talking about? The Greek word for price is used 41 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote 18 of them. We're seeing the first of four occurrences in this letter. Of course we're going to see it again in chapter 7 and verse 23, where Paul made this same statement again. But he also used it in chapter 12 and verses 23–24, where it's translated with the word "honor" in both verses. And normally this Greek word does have the nuance of honor or respect. But occasionally this word refers to the amount at which something is valued. And that's clearly how Paul was using the word here in chapter 6 and verse 20.

But what was the price that God paid to purchase us? Paul didn't address that question here because I think he expected his readers to know the answer already. And I think we already know the answer as well, but let's get confirmation by looking at some other passages. The same Greek verb for bought is used in Revelation 5:9, and in this verse we can see what the price was. John had a vision of what would happen in the future, and in this vision he heard a song that was directed to Jesus. Look at the words of this song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation."

The Greek verb for purchased in this verse is the same one that's translated with the word "bought" in our passage. But here we can see what the purchase price is: the blood of Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross and shed his blood, he paid the price for us to be set free from slavery to sin and become his slaves. This truth is called the doctrine of redemption. That's the language used in 1 Peter 1. Listen to what Peter

said in verses 18–19: “For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb.” So God redeemed us or set us free from bondage to sin with the precious blood of Jesus that he shed when he died on the cross. He fulfilled the Old Testament image of the Passover lamb. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.”

So Jesus paid the ultimate price to purchase our freedom. He died in our place and took the punishment that we deserved. The cross is the foundation for the temple. Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 6:19 that we’re the temple of the Holy Spirit because of what he said in verse 20. Jesus purchased our redemption through his sacrifice on the cross. He died for us so that the Spirit could indwell us. But God hasn’t just redeemed us spiritually in the past. We’re also going to experience physical redemption in the future. Listen to what Paul said in Romans 8:23: “Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” So Jesus purchased both our spirits and our bodies. And he gave us the Spirit as a guarantee that one day we’re going to receive glorified bodies. The cross didn’t just lead to the resurrection of Jesus. It’s going to lead to our resurrection as well!

So in 1 Corinthians 6:20 Paul started by saying, “For you were bought at a price.” And then he finished by giving a command: “So glorify God with your body.” The Greek word for so is used only five times in the New Testament, and this is the only that Paul wrote. It can also be translated with the word “therefore.” That’s what we see in the Legacy Standard Bible, the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version. But there’s a much more common Greek word with this same meaning. It’s used about 500 times in the New Testament and about 20 times in this letter. We just saw it in the middle of verse 15, where it’s translated with the word “so” in the Christian Standard Bible.

So why didn’t Paul use this more common word for so in the middle of verse 20? I think the answer is that he used the more rare word for emphasis. It would have caught the Corinthian believers off guard and grabbed their attention. Plus this word is normally followed by a command, and that’s exactly what Paul was giving here. He just used this word to intensify the command. And this command is the positive counterpart to the negative command that he gave to us earlier. In verse 18 he told us to flee sexual immorality, and here he told us to glorify God with our body. Instead of using our body to indulge in sexual sin, we should use our body to glorify God. He purchased us and made us his slaves, and so we need to obey him and bring him glory.

The Greek word for glorify is used 61 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote 12 of them. We see it only twice in this letter; the other one is found in chapter 12. Listen to what Paul said in verse 26: “So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” The Greek word for honored there is the same one that Paul used in our passage. Paul was saying that in a healthy church, everyone rejoices when one believer is glorified. Now sometimes the Greek word for glorify refers to the splendor that our resurrected bodies will have. But that’s not what Paul was talking about in chapter 12. He was referring to the enhancement of a person’s reputation. We should be happy for our fellow believers when they receive praise and glory.

But we should not seek praise and glory for ourselves. Proverbs 27:2 says, “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth—a stranger, and not your own lips.” So we should focus on enhancing the reputation of others. And of course the primary person who deserves praise and glory is God. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:16: “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” So everything that we do should enhance God’s reputation in the eyes of others. I love what Paul said in Galatians 1:24: “They glorified God because of me.” We need to live in such a way that we can say the same thing. We should not be focused on seeking glory for ourselves. Instead we should be doing whatever we can to get people to glorify God. And that’s what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 6:20. He said that he wanted us to glorify God with our body.

Now some translations don’t use the word “with” here. The English Standard Version, the Legacy Standard Bible, and the New American Standard Bible all have the word “in,” while the Christian Standard Bible, the NET Bible, and the New International Version have the word “with.” But the Greek preposition here can be translated in either way, and I don’t think there’s much of a difference between them. The word “in” basically means that we should glorify God as we live in our body. And the word “with” basically means that we should glorify God in the way that we use our body. So these Bible translations are all saying that we should focus on using our body to glorify God.

Now the King James Version and the New King James Version add another statement at the end of verse 20. Both of them end with these words, “And in your spirit, which are God’s.” These words are theologically accurate, but they’re probably not inspired by God. After all, this statement is not represented in the oldest and most reliable copies of the New Testament. And they don’t fit the context here anyway. Paul was focused on the body and not the spirit in this passage. He wanted the Corinthian believers to stop committing sexual sin and start using their bodies to glorify God. And we need to do the same thing today. We need to submit to the lordship of Christ and focus on enhancing his reputation. Let’s commit ourselves to live in a way that leads the people around us to give glory to God. Let’s close in prayer and ask for God’s help in this area.