

January 17, 2016
No Longer Our Own
Annette Hill Briggs
I Corinthians 6:12-20

[Glorify God in Body and Spirit]

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. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.

¹⁵ Do 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! ¹⁶ Do 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.” ¹⁷ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

¹⁸ Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. ¹⁹ Or 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? ²⁰ For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Our three mostly grown kids were normal teenagers. Sometimes they were sassy. They made their share of the mistakes typical to the frontal-lobe-challenged. They regarded us as obscenely, disgracefully strict: for calling other kids’ parents to confirm plans; for categorically forbidding all Saturday night sleepovers and most Friday night ones too. Our standard response was, “You aren’t legal and we are. So if you screw up, WE go before a judge; OUR names go in the newspaper; WE pay the property damage. You are our responsibility, and we are VERY responsible people.”

But they are all legal now. They only live part-time at home and full-time in our pockets. Which is great! We love this stage of parenting too. The rules have changed. We don’t call other parents, but we still have curfew. Now they choose to keep them, because they want to live at our house (and in our pockets); and, at least just a little bit, because they WANT to stay in relationship with us.

All of which is to suggest that here, five years into their Christian journey, Paul’s Corinthians were rather like Christian teenagers: believers not nearly as grown up as

it feels like they are, who imagined being far more ready to be on their own – faith-wise – than they were. In this case, brothers who still visited pagan temple prostitutes, and then made the case for why it wasn't wrong. Which, for Paul, are both problems to be dealt with: the behavior itself and the Christian cover story. He deals with their cover story first and then their wrongheaded theology.

I'll start with their wrongheaded theology: why visiting prostitutes is wrong, why it's a sin. We agree that it is wrong, don't we, friends? For more than theological reasons. Because we aren't Christian teenagers, most of us. Even the teenagers have been Christian longer than you've been "Christian teenagers." We aren't 1st century Greeks – people immersed in a culture of men who said, matter-of-factly, "mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children."

Paul's Judeo-Christian suggestion of one monogamous sexual relationship is not radical or outrageous to us, right? In our world, most people *don't* maintain one relationship for a lifetime – but the idea isn't radical. Promiscuity, sexual immorality, fornication – *porneia*, if you want the Greek word – is wrong.

Later, in chapter 7, Paul will say it's wrong because a person's body belongs to your husband or your wife, and makes that case. But before that, well before that, Paul says here that to be with another person as with your spouse is wrong because first and foremost you belong to Christ; that the way we are joined together with our spouse, in marriage, is the physical replication of the way we are joined together with Christ in spirit. And this spiritual joining is done by Christ and cannot be undone. So that when we leave the holy relationship of marriage – no matter how casual, or intellectual, or merely physical we tell ourselves it is – we lie.

We lie to ourselves. We lie to our spouses. We lie to the Lord.

Because such a story is not ours to tell. We did not write the story to start with, therefore we do not get to edit it to suit ourselves within it. *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? For you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.*

Again, friends, again – again – again: Jesus died and rose, once and what? For all. For all people. For all time. We have freely received the gift of God's unconditional grace, for nothing we have done or could do even if we wanted to.

Jesus demands nothing, but asks for what? Everything.

Heart. Mind. Soul. Strength. Money. Time. Wishes. Dreams. Debts. Secrets. Habits. Hungers. Fingers. Toes. Mouth. Ears. Belly. Arms. Legs. Hands. Checkbook. Bookshelf. Computer Files. Fears. Addictions. Worries. Victories. Neuropathways. Diet.

All of it, friends. All of it.

But you know what God doesn't want – at least what Paul's letter to the Corinthians suggests God doesn't want? Nonsense explanations, composed to satisfy ourselves or others

- ❖ that what appears wrong really isn't, because what it looks like we are doing isn't what we are ACTUALLY doing;
- ❖ OR how what we are doing is wrong for some people but not for us, because we are able to handle it;
- ❖ OR, in the case of the Corinthians, because: "All things are lawful for me";
- ❖ OR because: "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" and God will destroy both one and the other.

Paul is quoting them – their excuses, reasons, justifications – and then correcting them. All things are lawful (or permissible), they say. "But not all things are beneficial," Paul says. "I can jump off the roof if I want to," says the kid. "Does that make it a good idea?" asks the patient parent.

Because we are allowed to do something is no measure of Christian conduct. Paul will drive this point again and again. Or as Fee writes it, "Truly Christian conduct is never predicated on whether I have the right to do something; but whether my conduct is good, ultimately helpful to those around me."

But aren't we free? Of course! Are we free to sin? Do you want to be? Is that the freedom you want: the freedom to cause hurt and do harm? the freedom to divide and destroy the gift of fellowship?

That sounds more like bondage than freedom.

Belonging to Christ is rarely having to ask yourself, "Is what I'm about to do legal?" And instead, asking, "Is it helpful? Is it beneficial? Does it edify? Does it build up?" These are the questions Christians ask about the morality of our actions.

Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, they apparently said to Paul, in defense of their Temple visits. *The body was made for sex and sex for the body. Then the body is gone.*

Thus Paul's theological explanation of joining of our spirits in Christ – how we are bound to him as a wife to a husband – the further theological implication being that, *No, the body is not destroyed, but raised. He rose and we will too!* When Paul preaches, the gospel itself explodes from their sorry defense of their indefensible behavior. He da best!

Here's the thing. Almost all of our relationships include some degree, however slight, of duplicity, of acting one way but explaining ourselves differently. Because telling the

truth is hard. Just knowing the truth is hard – why we do some of the things we do. If we could figure out WHY we do them, maybe it would be easier NOT to.

But God knows – the truth, that is. The only relationship in which we have absolutely nothing to explain. God knows everything we do and why we do it, far better than we know ourselves.

I hope you know, friends, that's not bad news.

It's good news.

I don't care to wonder who in this room has visited a temple prostitute.

I suspect every one of us – at one time, or a thousand – HAS looked elsewhere for what only Jesus can give us.

It's ALL good news: God raised the Lord and will also raise us.

Good news: your bodies are members of Christ;

Good news: anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him;

Good news: your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which you have from God;

Good news: you are not your own; you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body.

Good news. Good news. Good news.

It is all good news. Would you pray with me?