

“Joined unto the Lord”

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

These verses go back to the topic of sexual impurity that was found in chapter five, and the subject of holiness and purity continue through chapter seven. Because this topic is dealing with a culture of moral relativism in the city of Corinth, and how the believers in the church were bringing back a good deal of the things they had left behind in their newfound faith, Paul included, in the greater context, other things that impacted their personal lives, and, more importantly, the life of the church as the representative body of Christ on earth. Having dealt with some other things relative to their testimony, he comes back here to the greatest problem the church faced at the time of the writing of the book – a mischaracterization and misapplication of “fornication.”

NOTE: “Moral relativism is the view that moral judgments are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint (for instance, that of a culture or a historical period) and that no standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others. It has often been associated with other claims about morality: notably, the thesis that different cultures often exhibit radically different moral values; the denial that there are universal moral values shared by every human society; and the insistence that we should refrain from passing moral judgments on beliefs and practices characteristic of cultures other than our own.” – Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy - <https://www.iep.utm.edu/moral-re/>

In these verses Paul addresses some apparent well-known sayings (proverbs, if you will) and shows the

incompatibility they had to the new life the believers had in Christ.

One thing to note here – there is no cause or reason for any believer today to lack a godly understanding of sexual immorality. All that could be considered in that area was dealt with long ago in this letter to the Corinthians. If a person, or a church, or any organization, decides they are going to live a lifestyle outside the scope of accepted, biblical morality then they do so at their own peril, and they do so with a complete and dynamic disregard for established truth.

We will come back to the text that the title for this message is taken from in verse 17, but by way of introduction and understanding, the word for “joined” comes from one that means “glue” – to glue together, to cohere, to cleave to, etc. These verses help us to understand what Paul was telling the Corinthian believers – they were joined to the Lord, making them one with Him, and they were to follow His lead.

Each portion of this text builds upon the previous – there is a progression to the final point made – we are to glorify God in our bodies.

I. LIBERTY – VS. 12

A. It is Memorial Day weekend, the time of the year we remember those who gave their lives for our freedoms. It is also worthy of us to consider the greatest price ever paid – the payment for our sins by our Savior on the cross. This text, in part, deals with that price paid for our liberty – what will we do with it?

B. The first of the sayings that appeared to

be a common proverb among the Corinthians, and seemingly the church in particular, was the one found here (twice), and again in 10:23 – “all things are lawful unto me.”

1. Although Paul is using this apparent proverb to bring into focus the liberty a believer has in Christ, he is using it to focus the church on the need to use their liberty for the advancement of the cause of Christ rather than a license to sin as they saw fit. (There are those that don't believe this was a common proverb, but simply “the bona fide words of the Apostle himself,” as Dr. Alford puts it. Either way, the point is still the same.)

“Paul limits the proverb to things not immoral, things not wrong, *per se*. But even here liberty is not license.” (Robertson)

2. To use this text, and others like it, to justify anything that would violate other Scripture would be a gross misapplication of what is being said and would show that the person (believer or not) simply wants to live their own way, no matter what the Bible says.

[Romans 6:1–2](#)

¹ What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

² God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

[Romans 6:14–15](#)

¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you:

for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

¹⁵ What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

3. The word "lawful" in this verse, and in this context, carries the idea of all things being in one's power to do, or it is permitted to do. The "all things" is not Paul saying he had a right to do anything he wanted, for that would seem to contradict what he says in the following portion of this text. As already stated, the "all things," within the context of Scripture, would be anything that doesn't violate the laws of God – biblically, morally, naturally.
4. "But all things are not expedient"
 - a) The "but" here is critical – no matter one's view of the "all things" in the text, it is what follows that clarifies and focuses on the point.
 - b) Those same "all things" that someone might claim as being "lawful" (allowed, permitted, within one's power) are to be controlled by a greater purpose – the testimony of Christ.
 - c) "Not expedient"
 - (1) *This Greek word (συμφέρω) is translated by the words "profitable" and "good" in other parts of the New Testament.*
 - (2) *It is translated "brought...together" in Acts 19:19, which is the literal translation of the Greek words that*

make up this one word.

Acts 19:19

¹⁹ Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

(3) *"To be profitable, advantageous, to contribute or bring together for the benefit of another"* (Zodhiates).

- d) Put all together, Paul is telling the Corinthian believers that, even if they have liberty to do what they want in their lives that the Old Testament saints did not have (they did not have to follow the Levitical Law with all its sacrifices and feasts, they did not have to be circumcised, they could eat whatever meat they wanted to, including that offered to idols, etc.), they needed to make sure that their exercise of their liberty added to the greater cause of Christ, and brought people together rather than tear them apart, or cause them to fall away.
- 5. He repeats the "all things are lawful" phrase both for emphasis, and, perhaps, for the sake of the proverbial restatement that was common in the Old Testament, and common among those that were fluent in Hebrew.
- 6. Coupled with the second use is the clause, "But I will not be brought under the power of any."
 - a) Not only was Paul not going to use his

liberty if it would cause a division among the body of Christ, he wouldn't use it and be limited in his usefulness for Christ.

- b) There is a play on words here with the first clause, "All things are lawful."

The Greek words are from the same root, whence there is a play on the words: All things *are in my power*, but I will not be *brought under the power of any* of them (the "all things"). (J-F-B)

- c) Dealing with those in the church that seemed to have no problem with either themselves living in fornication or with others doing so, Paul replies that he would not be brought under the power of any sin or vice, or anything that may be permitted a believer to do, if it would cause others to falter in their Christian walk.

[1 Corinthians 9:27](#)

²⁷ But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

II. LIMITATION – VS. 13-14

Liberty has limits – seen throughout the Bible.

A. The first sentence of verse 13 seems to be a proverb (and is accepted by most doctrinally sound theologians as being such), as was verse 12 with the phrase "All things are lawful unto me."

B. The issue it is dealing with is what was presented in verse 12, in the final clause – "but I will not be brought under the

power of any.” The world – both the unsaved world, as well as the church – seems to be consumed with “consumerism” and the “whatever feels good, do it” mentality. That is what is addressed here – the limits that our liberty in Christ has.

C. *“Meats for the belly and the belly for meats”*

1. “Meats” – not just animal meat but this word is used for anything that would be considered food today. This noun comes from the root of the verb which means “to eat,” or “to chew.”
2. Dr. Strong defines it as “*food* (literally or figuratively), especially (ceremonial) articles allowed or forbidden by the Jewish law.” There are some that draw from this that the proverb used by the Corinthians in the church were doing so to show that they didn’t have to follow the ceremonial Jewish law anymore, and that they had liberty to do whatever they wanted, including eating whatever they wanted. That argument was at the core of their carnality, and their continued wicked lifestyle.

D. *“But God shall destroy both it and them”*

1. Again, they used this argument to show that this life is temporal, and nothing done in this life really matters in the long run (or, in eternity). This was a form of what is known as “Gnosticism,” and what became to be understood as “Greek

dualism" (where the body and soul were separate, so what was done in the body didn't matter).

2. Paul seems to be turning this familiar proverb that the Corinthians were using to justify their lifestyle, and applying it in a biblical manner – God will, in fact, destroy this body, and in so doing will end the need for food when He gives a new, glorified body (we will eat but not to sustain life). The Corinthians were using that argument to justify sleeping with prostitutes (specifically), and for every other wicked lifestyle practice they wanted, but Paul was saying it is that very thing that should motivate us to live like a biblical Christian, knowing we have been changed (this is seen in the end of the text).

E. The second sentence of verse 13 brings the attention to the point that Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is making – sexual immorality ("fornication") is not what we are made for (gratification of the flesh is the overall principle here), but, as believers in Christ, as those who have chosen to become servants for Christ, we (including our physical body) are the Lord's for Him to do with as He will.

F. The reason for the liberty, and the reason for the limitations on that liberty are given in verse 14 – because of the power of the resurrection.

Philippians 3:8–11

⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss

for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

¹⁰ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

¹¹ If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Conclusion to this point: When a believer feels they have a right to do whatever they want, and they go to texts like this one to prove that philosophy, they do so with a disregard for the influence that the Lord wants them to have on others. Yes, there is liberty in Christ, but liberty is not lawlessness – in fact, James uses the term “the law of liberty” (1:25; 2:12), indicating there are restrictions (“limitations” as in this message) to that liberty. Those restrictions are there because we have a job to do, and that job is to represent Christ as His ambassadors. If we intend to see a world won for Christ, we are going to have to live within the confines of Scripture, not in the “anything goes” mentality or philosophy of the world.

James 1:25

²⁵ But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

James 2:11-12

¹¹ For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill,

thou art become a transgressor of the law.

¹² So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

III. LIKENESS – vs. 15-17

Limits, in turn, lead to likeness to Christ.

A. Again, we find this portion beginning with the phrase, "Know ye not" – this was, as before, something they were to already have known; something they, in fact, did know, but they seemed to have chosen to disregard the truth.

B. Likeness because of attachment – vs. 15

1. "Your bodies are the members of Christ"

- a) This is a form of a rhetorical question – the answer was an obvious "yes." It's more of a statement of fact than a question of acceptance or belief (although that was the point of the question).
- b) The word for "members" is one that points to a limb or part of the body – one that is joined permanently to the body.
- c) Our bodies, the physical body that is alive, the part of us that is seen (as opposed to our soul and spirit), "are" (present indicative – stated as a simple fact) part of the body of Christ. We, our bodies, are attached to Him, whether we want them to be or not.
- d) This is something that is brought up again in 1 Cor. 12 as it relates to the church – it

is a common teaching of Paul to the churches. Here, however, it is more personal, and more specific to the actual body we have, and what we do with that body.

2. "Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?"

a) Again, a type of question that is rhetorical, but this time he gives the answer that was, is, and always will be obvious.

b) "Take...make" – "The horror of deliberately taking 'members of Christ' and making them 'members of a harlot' in an actual union staggers Paul and should stagger us" (Robertson).

c) How can we take our body, as a part of the body of Christ, and make it a part of the body of a harlot (or accept, and/or justify, someone else who is a believer doing so)? It is beyond reasonable acceptance to do so, without question.

d) "God forbid"

(1) Used 13 times in Paul's writings and once in Luke 20:16

(2) Literally, "let it not be" (from two Greek words – one for "not," and the other carries the idea of to begin to be, or to come into existence)

(3) The ESV, NIV, NLT simply translates this "Never!" The NKJV has it as "Certainly not!" The CSB says "Absolutely not!"

C. Likeness seen by actions – vs. 16

1. The likeness I'm referring to here in actions is viewed in a principle of opposites – we can determine, quite often, what we are to do and how we are act by knowing what we are NOT supposed to do, and that is seen here. Whatever is opposite to this statement is what we are to do to be in the likeness of Christ.
2. The word “What” at the beginning is a conjunctive used 341 times in the New Testament and 268 of those it is translated “or” in the KJV. Only three times is it translated as it is here with a definitive statement of attention – “What?” The point being made is to draw attention to something they already knew.
3. The repeated rhetorical is found again – “Know ye not” – they already knew it; they just chose to disregard it.
4. “He which is joint to an harlot is one body” – this is a principle of Scripture found from the beginning of creation, seen in the quote from Genesis 2:24.

Genesis 2:24

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

- a) This is not an ambiguous statement – it is very definitive in both its literal usage as well as its application.
- b) Not only is this bringing to focus the church's lack of putting into practice the

teaching of Scripture on the subject of fornication, but it is also pointing back to the “abusers of themselves with mankind” in verse 9. God’s plan and design has always been, and will always be, one man and one woman for life. Man got in the way of this original plan and because of the hardness of the sinful heart God made “allowances” for divorce in certain instances, but that was never his plan.

Matthew 19:3–9

³ The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?

⁴ And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

⁵ And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

⁶ Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

⁷ They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?

⁸ He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

⁹ And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

- c) The principle that God established at the beginning (the Law of First Mention) is the rule to follow. What Paul is telling the church of Corinth here is that, while they may have liberty in Christ they do not have liberty to violate Scripture, and that is especially true of the issue of sleeping with a prostitute (which was so accepted in Corinth, and Greece, for that matter, that no one seemed to have a problem with it – except God Himself). When they did that they were, in God’s eyes, joined (glued cohesively) with them, and that went against all of the teachings of Scripture.

D. Likeness applied – vs. 17

1. The first word of this verse is very critical to the teaching – “but.” In direct and dynamic contrast to being joined unscripturally to a prostitute, we, as believers representing Christ on earth, are to be joined (glued cohesively) to the Lord and to no one else (outside of marriage).
2. The emphasis here is the contrast between what was accepted in the church of Corinth, and society as a whole at the time, and what they were supposed to be. Instead of being so connected to the lifestyle of the day, they were to be connected to the Lord, and all of His work. If they were, there would be no time, no cause, nor any desire to be like the world.
3. Their “joining” to the Lord, His word, and His work would then cause the believer to be of “one spirit.”
 - a) One difference to see here is that, with the

“harlot,” the joining was of the “body,” not of the spirit – the closeness of spirit was not a factor. But with union with the Lord, it is not just in body (in action), but in our “spirit” – the very part of us that fellowships with the Lord, and that part of us that defines who we are.

- b) The likeness to Christ is applied to us through our spirit by way of His Spirit.

John 17:21–23

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Ephesians 4:3–4

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

Philippians 2:5

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Conclusion to this point: Where are you in your likeness to Christ? Do you care more about the world, and what it has to offer, or have you allowed

the union with Christ to form you into His image and likeness?

IV. LEAVE – vs. 18

Likeness will cause us to leave the old nature and flee from the temptation that will lead us back to that old nature.

V. LEARN – vs. 19-20

Leaving allows us to be in a position where we are pliable and teachable by the Spirit of God through the Word of God.