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January 14, 2018 – 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 New International Version (NIV)

Sexual Immorality

¹² “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.”^[a] ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.^[b]

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Footnotes:

- a. 1 Corinthians 6:16 Gen. 2:24
- b. 1 Corinthians 6:17 Or *in the Spirit*

In most average, middle American households, one of the things parents of teenagers dread is for their kid to come home from school one day with big new tattoo, or maybe a nose piercing, or an eyebrow or lip piercing, or maybe a belly button. Maybe they’ve shaved all of their hair off, or spiked it up big and dyed it orange. These days one of the trendy new things is eyeball tattoos, coloring the whites of your eyes to permanently change their color. At least the piercings and hair can be temporary, the tattoos are a whole other problem.

I think my mom would agree that I never really had a rebellious phase like some kids did. I could be pretty independent but I didn’t get into that sort of thing too much. I saw it happen a lot though. The tattoos, the hair, the piercings, the makeup, all of those things were going on all the time.

For some it was a way to declare they were their own person, they could make their own decisions and weren’t beholden to mom and dad for everything. It was a private declaration of independence, engraved on their own body. For others it was a statement of some sort. Those who flocked to the glam and punk rock bands of the 70’s were big on making statements against the establishment and all of its offenses, whatever those happened to be at the time.

A lot of those things are more commonplace these days. Most of the various facial

piercings you can get don't even gain much attention anymore unless someone you have a lot of them. Tattoos also seem to be pretty common. A favorite saying, a cute picture, or a masculine one depending. All of them an expression of who you are, what sort of interests you have or what you feel is most important.

If that isn't really your thing, maybe you like your clothing to be an expression of who you are. It could be anything from tshirts with various slogans on them, to tank tops, to stiletto heels, biker jackets, three piece suits, or anything else. For some families, a son wearing a suit and tie can be as much of a rebellion as another getting a tattoo.

If rebellion is the motivation, that usually runs its course after a couple of years. You go off to college or move out on your own and real life starts to change your perceptions of what's important. You might still talk about those things or participate, but your job, your college classes, your new life lived on your own all take time out of your day. Soon you're not a teenager anymore and with a more mature perspective on life you set those things behind you to some extent and move forward. New interests, new causes, new places to focus your attention.

Looking down on those teenage rebellion years is a pretty common practice for anyone who isn't a teenager anymore. Even for those, like myself, who didn't go out and get tattoos and piercings, I can still look at how I acted and see a lot of the angst and drama that typically accompany that part of life.

Even when we pass through those years and come out the other side, life is actually not all that different. We may not be getting tattoos or piercings, we may not be dressing differently on purpose or getting crazy haircuts, but the attitude that goes with all of these things is one we are very much familiar with. Tattoos, piercings, crazy hair and all of those other things aren't really the problem. The deeper concern is that need to rebel that often drives people to do all of these things.

Despite the press they get and all of the support, abortions in this country are on a slight decline, unfortunately so are pregnancies in general. Nevertheless, the fact that abortion is still a widely supported, even encouraged, institution in this country and is responsible for more abuse and murder than all other terrible things our country has done put together, is a shame that will never be forgotten in our history.

When you look at the science of unborn babies growing in the womb, when you look at the ultrasounds and hear the heartbeats, when see and feel the child moving on their own, you

can't deny that is a person, a unique human being who will soon be born into the world. And yet, that's exactly what many people do. They look at all of the evidence and declare, "Nope, it's not true," or worse, "No, none of it matters." It doesn't matter to them because to them there is something more important, control over what happens to their body and their life.

"My body, my choice," many women chant. They resist any law or any other person who dares restrict what they can do with their own bodies. The same holds true for the would-be fathers too. It isn't their body, but it is their life, a life that will be upended by adding a child into the mix. They want to live free and without restriction or responsibility. They fully support abortion too, because it means freedom for them.

Abortion is just one of the most egregious examples, but there are many. Anything that threatens to take away your ability to be happy and to live life on your own terms is an obstacle that must be done away with. You'll rebel, you'll fight back, you'll sound the alarm, or do whatever you need to do to drive the offending individual away. They may tell you you can't live your life outside of your financial means, you can't have intimate relationships as often as you want, with as many people as you want, of one sex or the other, you can't indulge in whatever vice suits your fancy, particularly if you think you'll get away without any consequences.

"My body, my choice," isn't just the slogan of abortion advocates, it's the slogan of all of us. The regulations and laws are proclaimed and each of us stands up to chant our slogan, rejecting every restriction. What St. Paul says sounds pretty great here. "All things are lawful for me." That fits in quite well with our way of seeing things. No restrictions. No laws. Nothing to tell me what I can and can't do. My choice.

As Christians, that doesn't sound right. "Really? No restrictions?" Nope, no restrictions. Do whatever you like. It is your body after all. We're so used to hearing about the Ten Commandments and other laws that this sounds like a joke, but it's not. Do whatever you like. The laws of God had a purpose, St. Paul explains. They were to be a mentor, a teacher, like a guardian who teaches children how to behave, the laws were there to help people learn right from wrong and what good behavior looks like. The law isn't required for that anymore. You are grown up now. You are your own person. You can make your own decisions. Your body, your choice, no restrictions.

St. Paul isn't done. "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are

lawful, but I will not be dominated by anything.” There may be no restrictions, but saying “no restrictions” is not the same as saying “no consequences.” We’d like it to be. We’d like to be able to do whatever we want without consequences. We want all of the pleasure, all of the fun, and none of the pain, none of the grief, none of the suffering that comes with the unhelpful things we seek.

The consequences of our actions don’t simply vanish because we want them too. Even so, that doesn’t stop us. We charge ahead with all of the things the law told us to avoid. The abortions, the affairs, the indulgence and overindulgence of every secret and sinful whim. We protest against any notion that we’re not allowed to do these things. We hate the consequences though. We hate the fallout of the affairs. We hate the guilt and physical problems that come from murdering a child we’ve been given to protect and nurture. We hate how indulging in our secret sins ends up unravelling our life and becomes what we want most, dominating everything we do.

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.” All things are lawful, and we feel ourselves so free, so mature, so self-confident and capable that we drive straight for the most sinful things we can find and we devote ourselves to them, no matter how unhelpful, or even destructive they are, no matter how much they proceed to rule over us.

Christ shows us the consequence of “My body, my choice.” In the end, you have no choice. All things are lawful, but the consequences are still there and they all lead to one place. Continuing down that path and relishing your illicit pleasures eventually means that is all there is to your life. You have become so dominated by your sin that you don’t know anything else. You protest against anyone restricting you, ruling over you, dominating you that you allow yourself to be dominated by sin instead.

Christ shows us the consequence of our choice. Where we throw away our choice, Christ keeps his. He never allows anything to dominate him and he avoids everything that isn’t helpful, right up until the end. We shout, “my body, my choice!” and run from restrictions and laws. Jesus willingly walks into them. Judas and the soldiers arrive in the garden. Peter valiantly tries to defend him, but Jesus says, “My body, my choice.” He walks with them to trial. He walks with them to the mountaintop. He walks with them to the cross. The soldiers mock him and tell him to save himself. Jesus hangs there and says, “My body, my choice.” And it all ended as he

gives up everything.

Christ leaves the tomb on Easter morning and now his slogan isn't "my body, my choice." It's "your body, my choice." He sets you free from sin, from the pursuit of pleasure and happiness above all else. He sets you free from the consequences of eternal significance, because, where we would only choose our own destruction, Christ chooses for us. He chooses life. Life, peace, eternal joy and everything else that comes by following the laws God lays out for us.

He stands before you with his hands outstretched. He shows you the nail wounds and says, this is what comes of your choices. This is where you would be. So I chose for you and by my choice you will live. We look to the life of Christ and the promises he makes. We see that he doesn't give us laws and restrictions to punish us, but to help us, to give us a life that isn't free of consequences, but a life that avoids them. Christ shows you how everything he has done has been out of love, even when he tells you not to do something. He wants you safe. He wants you happy. He wants you to live. He makes a choice and he chooses you.

St. Paul says, "Glorify God in your body." He isn't forbidding tattoos, or certain styles of clothing or anything like that. He isn't making a negative statement, but a positive one. God has chosen you and you have the opportunity to show that to the world. Your words and actions can be a living testimony to what Christ has done for you. You can show the world that God's laws do not bring grief and misery, but life and joy. The world can see in you how, even though our every choice brings death, our choice doesn't matter anymore, because we have been chosen, and by his choice we are saved.