

The Imperfect Church – 11
The Immoral Church
1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Introduction

The Sunday before Easter is traditionally referred to as Palm Sunday. It gets its name from an event in the life of Jesus that took place the week before he rose from the dead, called the Triumphal Entry. As Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, the crowd met him with shouts of worship, laying down palm branches on the road (typically done for the coronation of a King). Hence, the name Palm Sunday. It represents the triumphal procession of the King into his domain.

Ironically, this past Palm Sunday there was a different kind of triumphant procession taking place. This one was in Augusta, GA [[pic – 18th green](#)], as Tiger Woods secured the victory at The Master's. Those who are fans of golf, regardless of whether they are fans of Tiger, rejoiced and celebrated such a phenomenal moment in the history of the game. The last time Tiger won a major tournament was the 2008 U.S. Open. Since that victory, he endured a highly-public, and highly-publicized divorce in 2010 after discovery of marital infidelities. From that moment, his life and career seemed to spiral to nothingness. He has endured multiple knee and back surgeries, unable to even swing a golf club as little as a couple years ago.

But now here he stands once again at the top of the sport. The number one word used to describe his incredible feat by the media is "redemption." [[pic – trophy](#)] One news outlet phrased it this way: "[With the cool stroke of a putter under ominous clouds hovering over the 18th green at Augusta National, Tiger Woods put an emphatic finishing touch on the most redemptive victory in sports history.](#)"¹ We all love a good redemption story. We love it when someone is "redeemed." We love to throw around words like that, but do we really know what they mean? What does it mean for a person to experience "redemption?" According to our text today, it certainly means more than winning a golf tournament.

TS – Since we have taken a couple weeks off of 1 Corinthians, let me remind you of where we are in the letter. After setting up the foundational truths of the Gospel, Paul now applies them to issue after issue. The primary problem facing the Corinthian Christians is their inability and/or unwillingness to "be

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-golf-masters-woods/redemption-song-tiger-sings-familiar-tune-at-masters-idUSKCN1RQ0R6>, accessed 4/23/19 at 9:46am.

the Church,” to live out the reality of being the “called-out ones” from the world. They have not severed ties with the wisdom and practices of the unchristian world around them. Their thinking and their actions seem to be no different than those who do not know God at all. Nowhere is that more clearly seen in their church, and among Christians today, than in the sin of sexual immorality. Though he already dealt with a rather extreme example of sexual sin in chapter 5 that was something even the pagans don’t participate in, now in chapter 6 he will show that their thinking and their actions are right in line with the non-Christian life all around them, the life that they supposedly had left behind.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – ⁹ Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.¹¹ Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

I want to camp in these verses for a few minutes before we move on to how he deals with sexual sin specifically. “Don’t you realize that those who do wrong...” The phrase “do wrong” is the Greek word *adikos*, an important word that guides what he is teaching us here. Its root word is *dikaios*, meaning “righteous” or “just.” So an “a” *dikaios* (*a* – no, *dikaios* – righteous) is someone or something that is unrighteous or unjust. Those who do wrong are those who are unrighteous (un-right) in what they do. Paul has already used this word in 6:1 when he called the court system “secular.” It’s unrighteous, it’s not Christian, it is without justice.

So people who are characterized by doing wrong (unrighteous) are not Christians. They “will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” Meaning, they are not sons and daughters of God who will receive the inheritance from their Father. It is a bold, in-your-face, uncompromising declaration. Notice what he says next.... “Don’t fool yourselves.” That’s the problem in Corinth, and around much of the American Church today. We have fooled ourselves (the word means led astray or deceived) into believing that we can claim Christ and live however we choose. It simply is not true. He goes on now to list a description of those who are *adikos*, centering much of it on sexual sin because of its prominence in their lives.

- “indulge in sexual sin” – Gk. *pornoi* – literally means a committer of sexual sin. It is a generic word that covers over all varying types of sexual sin. Though he will get very specific in types of sexual sins, this

one is the cover-all to ensure no one gets left out. Anything outside of God's design for human sexuality in covenantal marriage between one man and one woman, all of that falls under this word.

- "worship idols" – the largest building in the city of Corinth was the Temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Housed in this temple were over 1,000 temple prostitutes. To worship Aphrodite, you would visit one of these prostitutes. Idolatry and sexual immorality literally towered over their city.
- "commit adultery" – those who dishonor God's design for marriage by violating their vows of faithfulness they made before the Lord and before their spouse. Hebrews 13:4 - ⁴ Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery.
- "male prostitutes" – this word means "soft or effeminate." It was used to refer to men who wanted to be women (so those who would violate their God-given gender), and it referred to the passive partner in a homosexual relationship.
- "practice homosexuality" – this word was used to refer to the active partner in a homosexual relationship, and is the general word for anyone committing a homosexual act. 1 Timothy 1:10-11 - ¹⁰ The law is for people who are sexually immoral, or who practice homosexuality, or are slave traders, liars, promise breakers, or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching ¹¹ that comes from the glorious Good News entrusted to me by our blessed God. Romans 1 clearly tells us that a primary sign of God's passive wrath and abandonment of a society is the promoted practice of homosexuality. It is *adikos*.
- "thieves" – Gk. *kleptai*, where we get kleptomaniac. This one and "greedy people" and "drunkards" are pretty self-explanatory. The word he uses for "abusive" is the word for 'slanderer.' It is someone who hurts people by attacking their reputation behind the scenes. He ends the list with those who "cheat people," a reference to the previous section about lawsuits and those who manipulate the system for personal gain.

That's quite a list. And what do they all have in common? Those who commit such sins, though their sins are quite different, are all driven by one thing: selfishness. They are oriented around, and are solely in pursuit of, personal pleasure. Those who live like this are *adikos*, unrighteous.

Notice how he ends v. 10...**“none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.”** Those who choose to continue down this path in life are walking away from the Lord and towards ultimate destruction. This is the point where people like to argue. They read the Bible and see it condemn a sin they are committing, so they do all they can to justify their actions. Here are two of the main arguments we hear:

- 1) Didn't Jesus hang out with the kinds of people on that list? How could you condemn them? Yes, Jesus was known as a “friend of sinners.” His first followers were a ragtag group of misfits. He seemed to be more welcoming to prostitutes than the religious elite. He welcomed all kinds of sinners. But let's not forget one thing...he welcomed all kinds of “sinners.” He invited the worst of the worst to be with him. He did not do that to affirm their sin. He did that because they were those most in need of forgiveness, and those who were most aware of the reality of their sin.
- 2) Passages like 1 Corinthians 6 are from Paul, and he condemned sins like homosexuality. But Jesus never talked about it. Two problems with that: first, Jesus affirmed the Genesis 2 foundation of sexuality in marriage between one man and one woman. Second, we cannot limit God's revelation to only the words in red. The Bible is God's Word. Jesus is God. Therefore, the entire Bible is what Jesus talked about. So if anything in Scripture condemns any sin, it is Jesus doing the condemning.

Though this list is confrontational and convicting to many, v. 11 is the verse of hope. **“Some of you were once like that.”** They used to be that way. Those sins used to define them, meaning any one of those sins can be defeated and overcome by trusting in Christ. Those sins are not to define us. Jesus defines us. **“But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”**

- **“you were cleansed”** – likely a clear reference to their baptism. Paul is reminding them...you united with Jesus. He washed your sins away. We know it is likely a reference to their baptism because the only other time Paul uses this word for “cleansed” is in recounting his own conversion. Acts 22:16 - **“¹⁶ What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.”** Because they have linked their lives with Jesus, everything is now different. Your baptism matters and it signifies the profound life change that takes place when you trust in Christ.

Richard Hays – “To be baptized into Christ is to enter a reality in which the factors that used to give us status, security, and identity no longer count and we find our identity in Christ alone.”²

- “you were made holy” – the work of God in your life has set you apart. The word means “dedicated.” You are no longer what you once were, you now have been “called out” of that life, and have been set apart for God’s purposes. It is from this phrase that we get the theological concept of “sanctified.” It is the declaration that, in Christ, God has declared us to be holy, and we are living daily in the pursuit of living in that reality. Hebrews 10:14 - **14 For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.**
- “you were made right with God” – this is where *adikos* comes into play again. All these sins are *adikos*, unrighteous. In Christ, you were made *dikaïos*, righteous, right with God. What is he doing? He is reminding them...you don’t live like this anymore. You are supposed to sever ties with that unchristian world. You are not *adikos* anymore, you are *dikaïos*. So live like it.

David Prior summarizes the Corinthian situation like this: “For all their so-called knowledge, the Christians at Corinth had lost sight of the centrality of Jesus Christ, the controlling power of the Holy Spirit and the transforming experience of having been called and saved by God.”³

TS – With that powerful foundation laid down by Paul, now let’s look at the specific teaching on sexual immorality.

1 Corinthians 6:12-14 - **12 You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. And even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything. 13 You say, “Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.) But you can’t say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. 14 And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead.**

² Richard B. Hays, [First Corinthians](#), Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 100–101.

³ David Prior, [The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 87.

Apparently the Corinthians have these pithy little bumper-sticker slogans from their culture that they are leveraging to justify their sin. Paul soundly defeats their supposed wisdom and logic with Christian truth. Again, this is the problem with listening to and following human wisdom. It sounds good. It can even sound spiritual. But if it is not distinctly Christian, founded on the truth of Scripture, it will lead you into sin.

"I am allowed to do anything..." Now that's quite a statement to make! The arrogance of the Corinthian Christians is beginning to show. Their focus on human wisdom and the knowledge of their world has led to their demand to be able to do whatever they want to do. One scholar called it "philosophically-informed autonomy." They are smart. They are wise. They are enlightened people...therefore, they are independent of any authority and can live as they please. They are focused on their "rights" to choose how to live. Between 6:12 and 11:10, the concept of their "rights" is referred to 16x. Their arguments focus on the rights and freedoms of the individual. Paul focuses on devotion and service to God. Big difference. Again, focusing on your rights and freedoms to do whatever you wish is profoundly selfish, orienting you around nothing but you.

"I am allowed to do anything..." But not everything is good for you. Any smart, wise, enlightened person knows that throwing caution to the wind in the name of wild living is not only dangerous, it is the opposite of smart and wise. Wisdom understands the necessity of restraint and the need to care about others. Christian wisdom focuses on following the Lord's path to holiness, not our own path to unfettered pleasure. **"I am allowed to do anything..."** but it is too easy to become a slave to pleasure. We have one master and it is Jesus.

"Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food." When the physical body has a need, God has graciously given us food to meet that need. The stomach and food go together, satisfying the desire and purpose of both. Paul concedes that this true, and that God will destroy both in the future, acknowledging that hunger is a fleeting, temporary desire. The problem in Corinth was that they were taking this quasi-true, supposedly wise statement, and using it to justify their sin. They were applying it to their physical body and sexual activity. Their argument is simple...God designed our bodies in a way that has sexual needs, and he has given us sexual acts to fulfill those needs. Win/win. Here's the problem: that relegates your body to being nothing but a physical entity, whose only purpose is sexual fulfillment. Paul is clear...that's not what you are. That's not who you are.

You are more than your physical desires. Your identity is not found in your sexual preferences. You, and your body, were made for the Lord. Your identity is found in Him, and in Him alone. Notice the phrase at the end of v. 13 – “...and the Lord cares about our bodies.” This is huge. What you do with your body matters. God cares about what you do with what he made.

The Greek culture that Corinth is steeped in looked down on the physical body. One of their proverbial sayings was “The body is a tomb.” The Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, “I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse.” To them, the soul is important and the body didn’t matter. That led to two opposing extremes in how people lived: 1) rigorous self-denial, known as asceticism. Don’t eat, don’t get married, do nothing that is enjoyable because pleasure is evil. 2) licentiousness, living with license, without law. Since the body doesn’t matter, then I will do whatever it wishes. Neither extreme is healthy, nor biblical. Christianity offers the truth about your body...it matters, the Lord cares about it and what you do with it. It is not something to be mistreated here, or dishonoring to the Lord here, because we get to ditch it for the next life. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 - ²³ Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

This is why Paul issues this command in v. 18 - ¹⁸ Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.

TS – With all that said, Paul ends this section on sexual immorality by offering two compelling truths about the Christian that are to guide our views and behaviors regarding our bodies:

1. YOU ARE UNITED TO JESUS

6:15-17 - ¹⁵ Don’t you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ And don’t you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, “The two are united into one.” ¹⁷ But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.

You can hear him pleading with them...don’t you realize? Don’t you see what you’re doing? You are part of Christ. You have been joined with him. So if you are in union with Jesus, how could you ever unite your body with a prostitute? Paul here reaffirms the Genesis 2 foundational view of marriage between one man and one woman, and the sexuality found solely there.

Here's the deal: you're already taken. If you're a Christian, you are already united with Christ. And that union is to supersede any and all others. While we may be grotesquely offended by the mention of prostitution here, or dismissive because well, that's illegal and unlikely for us to participate in, he could just have easily said "coworker," "friend," "neighbor." Greek culture was not bothered by prostitution. It was everywhere, especially in cities like Corinth. It was legal, even religious, and sexual freedom was a given for Greek men. This was a normal part of everyday life. So Paul's ultimate concern here is not that you are going to sleep with a prostitute. His primary concern, yet again, is that the Church is just going along with what its pagan neighbors consider normal.

When you unite with Christ, everything changes. Now, you cannot take that which is holy and unite it with something unholy. By committing these sexual sins, they are uniting Christ with the pagan world. And that is the grossest of sins. Should a person do this? "Never!" is Paul's answer. In the Greek it is the phrase *me genoita*, meaning "May it never be!" It is the strongest negative statement in the entire language.

2. YOU ARE OWNED BY JESUS

6:19-20 - ¹⁹ Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself,²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

In chapter 3 he told them that, together as the Church, they are the Temple in which God dwells. Now he applies that truth to each individual Christian. You are where God lives. And you are not your own. Now we come back full circle to where we began. What does it mean to be redeemed? Redemption is a slave term, meaning bought and paid for, in full. At the cost of his life, Jesus purchased us, buying us back from sin and death. He owns us. When you think about it, I'm not sure everyone loves a redemption story. Because redemption has consequences.

v. 20 - "for God bought you with a high price." That phrase is easy to misunderstand. Here is how many typically interpret that: God had to pay a high price for me because I am so valuable. Value is determined by what someone is willing to pay for something. Diamonds are so valuable because people are willing to pay exorbitant amounts of money for a glorified rock. We cost so much because we are worth so much.

That is a humanistic way of interpreting the Bible. That paints us in the best light and makes us feel better about ourselves. Here is the right way to interpret that text. God had to pay such a high price for us because our sin was so excessive. God paid such a high price for us, not because we are so valuable, but because we are so sinful. Our sin carries a shocking price tag.

The Corinthians were so very concerned with their rights and freedoms. The general discourse in our world surrounding sexual and reproduction ethics is dominated by Corinthian slogans. We focus on our rights, our freedoms to choose, our independence. Don't fool yourselves, Paul said. We don't have any rights. Our responsibility is to, as he ends v. 20 – "glorify God in your bodies." The one question that must always be on our lips is this: will this bring glory to God?

As we bring this to a close, let me remind you of where Paul started this. He began by reminding them of who they were. And that always brings hope. There is always hope for the sinner, even for the most extreme. Remember the guy from chapter 5 who was committing this terrible sexual sin with his father's wife, that Paul told them to kick out of the church? In 2 Corinthians 2, he tells them to go get him and restore him. Show love to him. Why? Because Jesus shows love to sinners. You were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God. Now go live like it.

Romans 6:1-19

COMMUNION