

"LEAVE ME ALONE! IT'S MY LIFE"1 Corinthians 6:12-20**THEME:** Dealing with the claim of human autonomy.**DATE:** 01/14/07

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Since the time of the Pilgrims the prospect of liberty has drawn people of all races and nationalities to the United States.

In the Virginia Provincial Convention Patrick Henry uttered the words that became a sort-of American credo: "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

Freedom from governmental oppression and freedom to be all you can be are watchwords of the American experience.

- This celebration of liberty extends to individual rights and personal autonomy.

By nature people don't like to be told what they may or may not do. So, inevitably freedom became more and more personal, often voiced by the motto, "I have the freedom to do whatever I wish, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else."

Is that kind of autonomy a valid implication of our human freedom? Is there any way to know where the proper application of liberty ends and the abuse of freedom begins?

God's word, given to us through the Apostle Paul, provides some **insights** that explain the nature of our unique freedom as human beings.

I. OUR LIMITED AUTONOMY (1 Corinthians 6:12-13)

God created us to be always dependent on him.

Total autonomy was never God's plan for us. God placed restrictions on the first humans: *'And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'* (Genesis 2:16-17)

Of all God's creation, only humans were created in his image. Mankind has unique abilities among God's creatures, such as the ability to reason, the freedom to choose, and the capacity to grasp spiritual realities.

God created mankind as similar to himself as any finite being could be. Not even angels have the *imago dei*—the image of God. Even so, we are not autonomous little demigods.

- God gave our progenitors broad liberty to choose, and this is precisely where the first temptation confronted them. In the one area where God limited their freedom, the first humans chose to be autonomous.

They willfully crossed the only boundary God had set for them.

As a result they forfeited much of their freedom, and became enslaved to an evil power, the devil. That's how sin entered the world—mankind chose to reject God's command and to violate the restriction he had placed upon them.

No other earthly creature had freedom to choose to transgress the limits God had placed on them.

- When people try to exercise total autonomy, they act contrary to their very nature as created beings.

In the garden the couple rejected God's order and chose the serpent/Satan instead, and we all have suffered ever since.

They were like the dog in Aesop's Fables. The dog had a bone in its mouth. As it crossed the bridge it opened its mouth to grab the bone reflected in the water, and so lost the bone it had.

When the first humans reached out to grab autonomy, they forfeited the best parts of the freedom God gave them and they became enslaved to sin.

¹² *"Everything is permissible for me"-- but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"-- but I will not be mastered by anything.*

¹³ *"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"-- but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*

Paul wrote this letter to believers in the church in Corinth. Most of them had a pagan Greek background, and some of them brought into the church a pagan attitude toward morality.

Greek philosophy separated the spiritual from the physical.

They indulged their fleshly appetites and said it had no bearing on their spiritual nature.

- They carried it over to sexual appetites as well.

Paul insisted that God is interested in more than just our spiritual nature. He put the physical and the spiritual together. The body is as much for the Lord as the spirit is.

God made us physical and spiritual beings. What God joined together we must not separate.

- Paul quoted the Greek slogan, *Everything is permissible for me*. But they had been mastered by the things they claimed they had freedom to do.

There was gross sexual immorality in the church, and the church didn’t consider it a problem. The mores of the surrounding pagan culture had oozed into the church and become part of the church culture.

- Has the same thing happened in our culture? I believe it has.

America is a secular culture. There is no respect for the boundaries God set for us. People feel free to do as they choose, as long as it doesn’t violate or hurt anyone else. It’s a person-centered culture, and it began with the rebellion of the first couple in the garden.

When the first couple chose to cross the limits God set, instead of gaining the total autonomy they wanted, they became enslaved by evil and forfeited practically all their freedom.

- What you do in your body is God’s business. Your body is for the Lord. He made it and he holds the right to it.

[2nd insight that explains our unique freedom as human beings]

II. OUR PHYSICAL CONTINUITY (1 Corinthians 6:14-15)

Continuity means something that remains consistent and does not come to an end. There is a continuity between our present natural bodies and our future resurrection bodies. An essential part of your body now will factor into your imperishable body after this life.

So I am stuck with my body. I am not particularly pleased about this.

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?*

Jesus Christ was raised from the dead physically. After his resurrection the disciples could see and touch Jesus’ body and watch him eat food in their presence. (Luke 24:30-36 & John 20:19-27)

- The Apostle Paul said God is going to raise us from the dead also. He used an agricultural metaphor to explain this to the Corinthian Christians: *‘When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. . . So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.’* (15:37-38, 42-44)

The little seed you plant in the soil seems insignificant in comparison with the glorious plant that comes from it. But there is a continuity.

Wayne Grudem explains it *‘On this analogy we can say that whatever remains in the grave from our own physical bodies will be taken by God and transformed and used to make a new resurrection body. But the details of how that will happen remain unclear to us, since Scripture does not specify them—we are to affirm this because Scripture teaches it, even if we cannot fully explain how it can happen.’* (Systematic Theology, Zondervan, 1994. p.833-34)

Someone may argue that this is contradicted by the fate of Christian martyrs who were burned at their stake and their bones crushed to powder and scattered in the wind; and by those who perished at sea and their bodies were completely consumed by sea creatures. How could they be raised with resurrection bodies that have a continuity with their natural earthly body, when it was totally annihilated?

I can’t explain this, but it fascinates me. I know that each person has a unique genetic code wrapped up their DNA. I have clipped my fingernails in India, and combed my hair in China and sloughed off some of the outer layer of my epidermis when I showered in Singapore. God can use indestructible portions of my mitochondrial DNA that are scattered all over this planet ever since I was born in South Africa.

My resurrection body will have a marked resemblance to my natural body. Christ’s disciples recognized his glorified resurrection body. They could see and touch the marks of his wounds from the crucifixion.

- Paul said to the Roman Christians, *‘He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.’* (Romans 8:11)

A Christian’s resurrection body will be like Christ’s resurrection body.

Paul wrote this to the Philippian Christians, *‘But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.’* (Philippians 3:20-21)

Again Grudem writes, *‘Such a body is not all “nonphysical,” but it is a physical body raised to the degree of perfection for which God originally intended it.’* (Systematic Theology, p.832)

According to the Bible the resurrected body will be a physical body that has a continuity with the body that died and was buried.

- What about Paul’s statement, *‘I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable’* (15:50)?

It doesn’t mean that after this life we will exist in a nonphysical state.

He means that we will not have our fallen, corrupted fleshly bodies in the resurrection. His next words make this clear. He says we will be changed, *‘For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.’* (15:53)

Our bodies will not be replaced. We will be changed.

Our bodies will be imperishable and immortal.

- What does all this have to do with the argument that people have the right to do whatever they please with their bodies?

Your physical body is not just some tissue you will leave behind to live eternally as a spiritual being. Paul asked, *‘Don’t you know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?’* (15)

What you do in your physical body affects your relationship with your Lord Jesus Christ.

It’s sobering to realize that what we do in our bodies makes an impact on our Lord Jesus Christ.

[3rd insight that explains our unique freedom as human beings]

III. OUR VITAL RESPONSIBILITY (1 Corinthians 6:15-20)

Of all his creation God created us to be the most like him. He gave us the ability to make choices. But God never gave us absolute autonomy.

The meaning of life is inextricably connected to God.

Vaclav Havel, the great Czech leader said, *‘The tragedy of modern man is not that he knows less and less about the meaning of life, but that it bothers him less and less.’*

You cannot separate your accountability to God from what you do in and with your body.

Paul wrote, *‘For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.’* (Romans 14:7-8)

- The influence of secular, pagan philosophy was particularly evident in the sexual behavior of some who belonged to the Corinthian church.

Earlier in this letter Paul wrote: *‘It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans’* (5:1).

- Paul was very candid with them:

^{15b} *‘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.”’*

¹⁷ *‘But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.’*

¹⁸ *‘Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.’*

¹⁹ *‘Do you not know that your body is a temple 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 body.’*

Nobody has the autonomous right to declare, “My sexuality is my business. It’s my body. I’ll do as I please.”

- What does this say about our responsibility to God for our **Sexuality**?

God created us as sexual beings—male and female.

‘When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them “man”.’ (Genesis 5:2) The word “man” in Hebrew is *adam*.

God intended human sexuality to be so beautiful that the relationship between a husband and wife is an analogy for the relationship between God and his people, Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:31-32; cf. Song of Songs).

On multiple occasions the Apostle Paul gave stern warnings against sexual immorality, sexual perversions and homosexuality in his letters to churches in a sexual, pagan culture.

- What is the sexual climate in the American culture? It validates the homosexual lifestyle, but God condemns it as abominable.

The gay lobby is powerful. It has reshaped the attitudes of most Americans. They appeal to us all to respect the rights of homosexuals to be happy and fulfilled. But I read recently that suicide, drug abuse, alcoholism, and disease rates among active homosexuals soar far above average rates for the whole populace (*Without a Doubt* p. 218)

- Let me emphasize here that, no matter what the sexual sin a person has engaged in, God’s grace is sufficient to forgive and cleanse and renew any penitent sinner.

But God has not granted us autonomy to do whatever we please with our bodies.

- This principle extends to matters of **Life and death.**

Advocates of a pro-choice position on abortion argue that an unborn child is an extension of the mother’s body. So, if a mother has a right to do what she pleases with her own body, she has a right to abort the child.

That position is based on a fallacy. No baby is a mere extension of its mother. A baby is distinctly different from its mother. About half of all babies are a different sex. Many have a different blood type. The genetic makeup of a baby is not the same as its mother; it’s totally unique.

In its earliest unborn state a baby is an individual—created in God’s image and likeness, and the possession of Almighty God. No mother has the right to do whatever she pleases with her body when she is pregnant.

Speaking at a prayer breakfast in Washington D.C. in 1993, Mother Theresa of Calcutta said, ‘. . . *if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? . . . Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want.*’

- In most churches there are probably women who have had an abortion. Again, God’s grace is great enough to forgive completely any sin, if the person repents sincerely with faith in Jesus Christ. She may have to deal with deep sorrow for her choice, but she won’t have to deal with any guilt before God. In God she finds comfort and peace.
- What about euthanasia? *Euthanasia* means “good death.” Sometimes it’s a bad thing.

Because we belong to God, we have no individual right to take our own lives or to help a suffering person to take his life.

This is a complex issue because of all the modern medical means to sustain life by chemical or artificial means.

Family members need wise guidance and divine help to understand if they are extending the life or just prolonging the dying of a loved one.

I thank God for the ministry of hospice. Hospice teams help dying people to die with dignity and with as little pain as possible, surrounded by those who love them.

We have several hospice personnel who are part of our church family. What they do is pleasing to God. I think we can say they are his “angels” on an assignment that is close to the heart of God.

- Our responsibility to God does include a physical dimension. God has not given us *carte blanche* to do whatever we please with our bodies. Nobody has the right to declare before God, “Leave me alone! It’s my life!”

Nobody has been given absolute autonomy. God made you and he owns you.

Christians belong to God in a greater way. They have been redeemed, rescued from the power of Satan who held them captive in sin. They have been bought with a price.

Whether you are a Christian or not, you will have to give account to God for what you have done in your body. No exceptions. (Revelation 20:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10)

Is it time for you to ask God to forgive you for what you have done in your body?

Do you need to be honest with yourself and with God and stop kidding yourself that what you do in your body is harmless because your spiritual welfare is assured because of your faith in Christ?