

Instruments of Righteousness

1 Corinthians (CGS#12) – 6:12-20

INTRODUCTION: Paul begins this next section with three different quotations. These are statements from the Corinthians that Paul is quoting back to them. Whether they actually said these things to Paul in person or in a letter is not important to what Paul is doing. He is quoting back statements that were pervasive in the culture of Corinth and would have been easily recognized and affirmed by the Corinthian believers. We can even imagine a few “Amen’s” or a loud “Yes” in agreement when those statements were read aloud in the gathered assembly. However, Paul isn’t affirming the Corinthian vision of liberty, freedom, or permissiveness; he is arguing for a better way in Christ Jesus. Let’s take a second to remind ourselves of the culture of Corinth.

“Sexual sin there undoubtedly was in abundance, but it would have been of the same kind that one would expect in any seaport where money flowed freely and women and men were available. The religious expression of Corinth was as diverse as its population. Pausanias describes at least 26 sacred places (not all were temples) devoted to the “gods many” (the Roman-Greek pantheon) and “lords many” (the mystery cults) mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 8:5—and Pausanias does not mention the Jewish synagogue, whose partial lintel with the inscription “synagogue of the Hebrews” has been discovered. All of this evidence together suggests that Paul’s Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world. **The scattered pieces of evidence from Acts, 1 Corinthians, and Romans suggest that the church was in many ways a mirror of the city.**”¹

Did you catch that? The church was a mirror (reflection) of the city and not of Christ. We’ve said it this way, tragically, they looked more like Corinth than Christ. So here is Paul calling out the cultural (worldly) ideologies that they have bought hook, line, and sinker and are corroding them from the inside out. Paul instead gives them a better vision for their lives, community, and relationships. This better vision that is rooted in Jesus includes what they do with and how they think about their bodies. Paul tells them (and us), your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit and is to be an instrument of righteousness (v.19). Again, this is a radically different vision not only for daily life but for how they understood the significance of their bodies. They were given a physical body by God, and they will have a physical body in the glorified age to come (v.14-15). This was true for them, and it is true for us today.

We may not live in ancient Corinth, but we share a key cultural dynamic, a deep desire for independence and freedom. We, too, might hear Paul’s quotations and agree in our hearts, saying, “Of course I’m free to do what I want.” Yet, we need to be reminded that we, too, have been bought with a price. That our bodies aren’t accidental, or needing to be sources of shame, or vehicles to satisfy our every whim and desire. **No, our bodies are to be instruments of righteousness.** After all, we were made holy in Christ. That means we are set apart for a new purpose as a new people. And that purpose isn’t merely spiritual or intellectual; it is a physical reality. To bring this argument full circle, Paul teaches us that we will have physical (glorified) bodies in the age to come. So not only do our bodies matter now, but they matter in the scope of eternity. Again, they are not accidental nor incidental. What we do with our bodies now is, in part, a preparation for what we will do with them in eternity.

GETTING STARTED – As you begin your group time, take time to answer this question together: If you had to give a vision for the beauty of the Christian life in one minute, what would you include? Consider the parts of the human experience – physical, emotional, spiritual, communal, and intellectual.

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 3.

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage. It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday-Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions about the article of faith we are studying that week.

1. What did you hear God's Spirit say to you through the passage this week? How does it encourage you? How does it sharpen you?
2. How have you seen God at work in your life this week? Have you enjoyed him? Have you heard his voice and the leading of his Spirit? Big ways or small ways.
3. We talked about how sin encompasses our defiance (actions), deficiencies (insecurities), and can dominate us. Which of those three aspects of sin do you most acutely feel on a daily basis? What is the deficiency (insecurity/limitation) that you are trying to solve through patterns of sin? Don't forget, we all have patterns of sin in which we try to solve some deficiency.
4. The Corinthians idolized freedom, individuality, and personal pleasure. They took the good gifts that God gave them and turned them into objects of worship. What are some of the good gifts that God has given you that can quickly or easily become an object of worship?
5. Paul reminds us that we are holy, that is, set apart as a new people and for a new purpose. How often do you think of yourself as being an instrument of holiness in your everyday life? How would it change your daily life to remind yourself of that reality?