

Instruments of Righteousness

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



I always find it interesting when you find threads of Biblical truth within elements of pop culture like movies and music. One of those threads stood out to me in the movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean*. This movie follows blacksmith Will Turner and eccentric Captain Jack Sparrow as they set out to rescue Elizabeth Swann, daughter of the governor, who has been kidnapped by Captain Barbossa and his cursed crew. Barbossa's men, once ordinary pirates, are doomed to live as undead after stealing Aztec gold. By moonlight, they appear as skeletal specters, unable to taste, feel, or satisfy any desire until the treasure is returned and blood repaid. Elizabeth becomes the key to breaking the curse, mistaken for the child of pirate Bootstrap Bill Turner. As alliances shift, Jack pursues his own schemes to reclaim his ship, the Black Pearl. The story weaves together adventure, betrayal, romance, and supernatural mystery, blending swordfights, sea battles, and humor. Ultimately, the curse is lifted, Jack escapes the gallows, and the seas remain as wild and unpredictable as ever. Early in the movie, we learn about the purposes and the tragedy of Barbossa and his cursed men in a brilliant moment of dialogue. Barbossa explains their predicament, **"We spent 'em and traded 'em and frittered 'em away on drink and food and pleasurable company. The more we gave 'em away, the more we came to realize the drink would not satisfy, food turned to ash in our mouths, and all the pleasurable company in the world could not slake our lust. We are cursed men, Miss Turner. Compelled by greed, we were, but now we are consumed by it."**

Poignant, isn't it? This fictitious dialogue gets right at the heart of a deep truth we all feel. No matter how hard we chase after the world's systems, structures, and values, they eventually ring hollow. Instead, we long for something that truly satisfies and brings lasting purpose and hope. Paul has reminded the Corinthians that this very purpose and hope has been offered to them through Jesus, and Jesus alone. That is why their current way of living, where they are chasing the structures, values, and desires of the world, is incompatible and will eventually fail them. In fact, they are failing them right now because they have led to divisions, rivalries, quarrels, and grievous sin that leads to abuse. **They are a new people, with a new purpose, and their bodies are to be instruments of righteousness.**

1. Don't be dominated.

a. The two phrases – It might be permissible, but it isn't beneficial.

- i. Discerning Corinthian citations in the letter is complicated, but most scholars think that the words *I have the right to do anything*, quoted twice in the verse, reflect a Corinthian slogan. The slogan was probably particularly used to justify doing whatever they wished sexually with their bodies, and the same saying appears with reference to food offered to idols (10:23). Possibly, the slogan comes from Stoic sources and was picked up by believers. Paul does not reject the slogan entirely but qualifies it, since it could be applied in misleading and destructive ways (so also in 10:23). Even though 'everything is permissible' (CSB), not everything is *beneficial*. Some matters which are permissible are not helpful. At the same time, there is the danger of being *mastered by* what is allowable. Some might find themselves enslaved by something that is not necessarily wrong in and of itself. Freedom, as Paul teaches elsewhere (Gal. 5:13), should be pressed into the service of love.¹

1. What is clear, is that Paul was quoting a phrase or idea that was known to them. And one that they readily agreed with.

ii. This is an important question in our age – Is it beneficial?

1. We want to feel like we know the truth, we understand our world, and we want to feel safe.
2. As Christians, what is the thing that we are fixed on and see as most beneficial? → Becoming like Christ. So that question for us really isn't, "Is it beneficial?" it is, "Does this help me become more like Christ?"
3. Paul wants to clarify for them exactly what he means here with issues of liberty and sanctification, so he relates it back to food.
 - a. Perhaps the Corinthians drew an analogy between the appetite for food and the desire for sex, arguing that one should satisfy the latter whenever one wishes, just as one satisfies the former. If so, Paul refuses to countenance the analogy, claiming that *the body* is not intended for *sexual immorality (porneia)* but *for the Lord*. The body was created, not to fulfil sexual desires, but for the Lord's sake, so one should use one's body to please the Lord. Similarly, *the Lord is for the body*. The word *Lord* signals that Jesus is the master over one's body; he rules over what believers do with their bodies. And he is the Lord over the bodies of believers for their benefit, so that they might flourish.²
4. He also offers another boundary for the believer – Not only are some things not beneficial, but the believer is not to be dominated by anything either.

b. What is sin? - A theology of sin. (3 angles)

- i. **Defiance** – Sin is any evil action or evil motive that is in opposition to God. Simply stated, sin is failure to let God be God and placing something or someone in God's rightful place of supremacy.³ This includes sin of **commission** – an ungodly action that I willingly do. And it includes sins of **omission** – a godly action that I willingly do not do.

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 126.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 126–127.

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 513.

- ii. **Dominion** – Sin is a principle of captivity to a power that permeates and contaminates our human reality. *Sin* is the word Christians use to name not simply our failed acts but also our inner and outer captivity.
- iii. **Deficiency** – The desire to overcome our limitations and finitude because of anxiety about our creaturely existence.⁴ We feel this especially in the **empty promises** of sin. These are the promises that sin makes to solve or fulfill our deficiencies. However, the only one who can solve our deficiencies is the one who is not deficient, Jesus
 - 1. Each of these definitions gets at the full reality of sin. **Yes, sin involves our wrong or broken actions, but it is more than that. Yes, it is a power that captivates our present reality, but it won't always. Yes, it is part of a dysfunctional identity where we believe that we can overcome our finite limitations, but in Christ, we find a new and completely fulfilled identity.**
- c. **How do we see the defiance, deficiency, and dominion of sin expressed in Scripture? Each of these definitions is seen in the original fall of Adam and Eve. (Gen. 3:1-13)**
 - i. **Defiance** – They took and ate. (cf 3:6)
 - ii. **Deficiency** – “God is holding back on you... you can be God.” (cf. 3:1-5)
 - iii. I.e., there is some limitation to overcome.
 - 1. **The fundamental unbelief, distrust, and rejection of God and human displacement of God as the center of reality.** ⁵
 - iv. **Dominion** – The resulting impact of their rebellious action is that of the dominion of sin. (cf. 3:7-13)
 - 1. **Sin caused them (and us) to feel shame and hide.**
 - 2. **That shame and hiding amplify the pain of sin. We want to find relief from the pain, so we often treat it with more sin. This leads to more shame and pain, and the cycle continues.**
- d. **The gospel** – Jesus came not only to interrupt that cycle but to lead us into healing and restoration.
 - i. Rom 5:20,21 - ²⁰ **Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,** ²¹ **so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**
- e. **Sin in the Biblical perspective. → The Bible does not pull punches on the subject of sin.**
 - i. Jesus has the authority to forgive sin. (Mark 2:9-10)
 - 1. **Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”**
 - ii. Sin causes shame and dysfunction. (Gen 3:1-13)
 - iii. Sin leads to death. (James 1:15)
 - 1. ¹⁵ **Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**
 - iv. Sin impacts all people (Rom 5:12)
 - 1. ¹² **Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.**

⁴ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader. How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World*, (2015), 185.

⁵ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 107.

- f. The good news is that God's response to our rebellion (sin) is to seek humanity out and offer redemption through his Son (Jn. 1:1-18, 3:16). **And it is through Jesus that we can be rescued, reconciled, and renewed to God (Rom. 6:5-11; Eph. 1:9).** To be **rescued** from sin is to be rescued from the wrath of God against the evil of our sin (1 Thes. 1:10, 5:9). To be **reconciled** is to now be in covenant peace and relationship with God where there is no animosity nor fracture between us and God (Eph. 2:17-22; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). And to be **renewed** is to be actively and regularly formed into the image of Jesus (Rom. 12:2; 1 Jn 2:6; 2 Cor. 3:18). Without this work of Christ, the wrath of God would be poured out on humanity and result in our eternal separation from God (Jn. 14:6).
- i. This is what makes Paul's instructions and reminders that they are a new people with a new purpose so important.
 - ii. Their bodies are part of their redemption, they are holy temples, and are to be instruments of righteousness.

2. Holy Temples

- a. The Temples of Corinth. → Primary is the Temple of Aphrodite.
 - i. **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. Although there is no direct evidence for it, the very wealth that attracted artisans and tradesmen undoubtedly also lured to Corinth artists and philosophers of all kinds, in search of patronage. The latter would also have included a fair share of itinerants and charlatans. 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.⁶
 - ii. **For the time of Paul, archaeology has thus far attested a temple of Fortune and temples or shrines to Neptune, Apollo, Aphrodite (on the Acrocorinth), Venus, Octavia, Asclepius, Demeter, Core and Poseidon** (cf. Murphy-O'Connor and Wiseman).⁷
 - iii.
- b. What is holiness?
 - i. **holy.** A biblical term generally meaning **"to be set apart."** The term is used widely in Scripture to refer to a variety of people and objects alike but ultimately points to God as the one who is qualitatively different or set apart from creation. *Holy* may also be used to describe someone or something that God has "set apart" for special purposes. In the NT holiness takes on the sense of ethical purity or freedom from sin. The fullness of the biblical witness, then, testifies to God's holiness, understood as God's "otherness" and "purity," as well as to God's prerogative to set people and things apart for God's own

⁶ 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.

⁷ Scott J. Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letters to The," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 173.

purposes, together with the resulting godliness in the lives of those whom God declares to be holy.⁸

1. V. 19 - God's holy presence is no longer limited to the temple, for he indwells the church of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:16) and even the bodies of individual believers. Since every place where God dwells is holy, believers must be careful not to defile God's temple—that is, their bodies—with sexual sin. Believers are no longer autonomous; they are not the sovereign authority in their lives. Instead, they live under God's authority since they belong to him and are indwelt by him.⁹
2. V. 20 - Verse 20 explains why believers are not autonomous, why they are not '[their] own'. For some reason, the NIV leaves out the 'for' (*gar*) in the text (see the CSB here), but the 'for' makes it clear why the bodies of believers belong entirely to God: they *were bought at a price*. The word *bought* (*agorazō*) is used elsewhere by Paul to denote the ransoming effect of Christ's sacrifice (1 Cor. 7:23; cf. 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3). We also find the closely related word 'redeem' (*exagorazō*) in two crucial places in Pauline literature (Gal. 3:13; 4:5). The *price* here is almost certainly the blood of Christ; hence the word 'ransom' nicely captures what is being communicated. Believers have been freed from slavery at the price of Christ's blood, and now they belong to God; their bodies are under his lordship (cf. Rom. 6:15–23). Since God has loved believers in such a way, they are called upon to *honor God with your bodies*.¹⁰

ii. When we think about holiness on a practical level, how should we think about it?

1. **A new people** - We are not who we used to be... we belong to God.
 - a. This is the reality of our new identity in Christ. Remember how Paul said it at the beginning of the letter, "those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus."
 - b. This begs the question, if I am to be identified with Christ, what am I actually known for?
 - i. Do people know more about my political opinions?
 - ii. Do people know more about sports allegiances?
 - iii. Do people know more about my career and accomplishments?
 - c. **These questions aren't aimed at diminishing the very real things of this life as insignificant or needing to be completely rejected. Instead, these questions are oriented at recalibrating our allegiances and our identities.**
 - i. Which, by the way, we need our allegiances and identities constantly recalibrated.
2. **A new purpose** - We are not to act or think as we once did... we are to glorify God.
 - a. As our allegiances and identities are recalibrated, then our behavior begins to follow. → This is the process of sanctification and transformation.

⁸ Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 60.

⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 129.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 129–130.

- b. This is also why Paul stresses such a significant emphasis on what the Corinthians are doing with their bodies. Their minds or spirits (souls) aren't merely the only part of their regeneration, so are their bodies.
 - i. In chapter 15, Paul will go on at length about the reality of glorified physical bodies. Our physical bodies matter. They matter to God. They matter to our community as we are to act justly with them. And they matter in the light of eternity. **In fact, what we do with our bodies now, is, in part, a preparation for what we will do with them in eternity.**
 - c. **This new purpose is to infiltrate our everyday lives.**
 - i. Am I satisfied with the standards of success and influence of the prevailing culture?
 - ii. Am I known to be someone who is slow to speak, quick to listen, and thoughtful with my words? Or, am I convinced that the outrage of the culture is the better way?
 - iii. Do I take my sin seriously, or do I dismiss and rationalize it?
 - iv. Am I captivated by the power structures and systems of this age or is my hope tangibly in the reality that Christ is King?
- c. Rewind back to belief and behavior. → **An important warning: Everything is formational.**
 - i. We live in an age of unprecedented information and perspectives. This leaves us being reminded of a question that we asked in the early weeks of the series, "Who am I of?"
 - 1. Too often we try to make sense of our world not by allowing the Bible to speak first, but by using the bible to justify our cultural perspectives.
 - 2. We are at an even greater risk of this happening right now with all of the "information" that is at our fingertips and our rabid obsession with celebrities.
 - ii. **Everything is formational.**
 - 1. There is nothing in this life that is not shaping or forming us in some way. I.e., Nothing is neutral and everything is trying to be the ultimate love of our lives.
 - 2. This means that sports, news, social media, relationships, and activities are all formational. This isn't to be some spiritual boogeyman syndrome. Where we cast off anything and everything that isn't "Christian," but is to be a sobering reminder that there is nothing neutral in this world. So we need to ask ourselves the question, what are we being formed into?
 - iii. **Is it forming me to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit or the fruit of the flesh?**
 - 1. Jesus' words on evaluating and judging false teachers doesn't just apply to religious teachers. Yes, we should absolutely weigh and judge Bible teachers and preachers against the very word of God and faithful teachers that have come before.
 - 2. We also need to examine the other areas and influences in our lives and ask how they are forming us and what are they forming us into?
 - iv. **We should ask these questions to examine what is forming me:**
 - 1. How many hours of podcasts do I consume in a week?
 - 2. How many hours of news and political talk do I consume in a week?
 - 3. How many hours am I on social media per day?
 - 4. How many hours do I spend in interpersonal relationships?
 - 5. How many hours do I spend reading or listening to Scripture?
 - 6. How many hours of intentional rest am I taking per week?