

CONFRONTING SEXUAL ATHEISTS

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

In 2014 the internet dating site, [Christian Mingle](#), did a survey. It polled unmarried Christians between the ages of 18 and 59. They were asked the straight-forward question, “[Would you have sex before marriage?](#)”

Here’s the response, a whopping 63% said “[Yes.](#)”

An article commented on the survey...

When it comes to sex most Christian singles are no different than atheists. They act as if God has nothing meaningful to say about their sexual practices....

It’s the ultimate oxymoron... *Why would people who believe God created all of life and knows best how it’s to be lived, not seek His wisdom regarding their most intimate and potentially-fulfilling experience?* The article coins a term for the 63% of Christian singles, “[sexual atheists.](#)” The phrase also describes the Corinthians.

Know, these Corinthians were Christians. Their faith was real. In verse 11 Paul tells them, “[You were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.](#)”

Unpack those terms and their condition was hopeful.

God’s Spirit had cleaned their conscience - made them His own - even put them on good terms with God.

The problem though is they weren’t living up to their calling. Especially, when it came to their attitude on sex.

The phrase “**sexual atheist**,” is not a flattering term. It was coined to convict Christians who ignore God’s wisdom on sex... Whereas, the Corinthians were *coining phrases* to justify their pagan approach to sexuality...

In the last nine verses of Chapter 6 Paul plays off several *sayings* the Corinthians were using to rationalize their promiscuous behavior. He quotes three mottos...

The first is in verse 12, “*All things are lawful...*” The second is in verse 13, “*Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods...*” And the third “*saying*” is in verse 18, “*Every sin that a man does is outside the body...*”

We don’t know if the Corinthians had developed these “*sayings*” themselves, or if they were just using slogans from the pop culture, but Paul reveals their twisted logic.

He plays off these Corinthian platitudes to debunk their foolishness and explain the Christian view of sex.

The Corinthians thought they were so smart. They had answers for everything. In their minds, they’d justified their immorality. In Chapter 6, Paul sets them straight.

Paul begins in verse 12, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

Realize this is an enormous verse. It’s gigantic. You can’t over-emphasize or over-exaggerate its importance. 1 Corinthians 6:12 is ***the Mount Everest of ethics***.

The Jews have their “**Ten Commandments**.” Muslims have their “**Five Laws**.” Yet, in a single verse Paul lays out “**The**

Christian Ethic.” Here are the Christian’s list of dos and don’ts. Here’s the moral code by which *all Christians*, in *all eras*, and in *all cultures* should live by...

Paul writes in verse 12, **“All things are lawful for me...”**

What? **“All things are lawful...”** *What kind of loose, lax, permissive, slack code of behavior is that?*

The critic who accuses Christianity of being too stringent, and repressive, and legalistic hasn’t read 1 Corinthians 6:12. There’re no taboos. *Anything goes.*

You can’t get any freer than **“All things are lawful...”**

Understand, Paul was a Jewish rabbi, a Pharisee - of the strictest sect. Before coming to Christ he’d been a staunch legalist. It was dos and don’ts, rules and regs.

He’d followed the letter of the Law to its nth degree, yet it didn’t make him righteous. *Self-righteous for sure*, but not righteous enough to be pleasing to God.

Yet now in Christ he’d been freed from the Law. It was no longer *what Paul could do*, but *what Christ had done*. Through faith Paul had received Christ's righteousness.

A Christian is saved, and then grows spiritually **by faith not works, by grace not law, by the Spirit not the flesh.**

Paul had his fill of legalism. He now saw it as an obstacle. It inflamed his pride and filled his heart with hate. Legalism was the enemy, and he was not going to allow Christianity to be pulled an inch in its direction.

On top of his own experience there were people in the first century who leaned toward asceticism and legalism.

They said *“the more you deprived yourself legit pleasures the closer you got to God.”* Paul confronts them in the NT. He warns in 1 Timothy (4:3) of folks who come, *“forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”*

The last thing Paul wanted was for the legalist to get his mitts on Christianity and turn it into another Law.

Verse 12 makes it clear, Christians are not governed by Law... *BUT that doesn't mean we're not governed* - that nothing limits or directs our behavior is ludicrous.

That would be disaster. Anarchy is not a good idea.

Under the Law we were a dog on a leash. You might think it's cruel to always keep your dog on a leash. You might want to relax the leash, or even remove the leash.

And that's a nice idea, but first you need to train your dog - domesticate and curb its animalistic nature - send the dog to obedience school before removing the leash.

This is what God does with us. He removes the leash of legalism, but only after He enrolls us in the Holy Spirit obedience school!... A Christian is governed, but *by love not rules - by the Spirit of God not the letter of the Law.*

Here's how Christianity works... rather than assign us new *rules*, God sends His Spirit to *rule* over our hearts.

He changes and guides us from the inside out.

God gives us a *new nature* that replaces our *sin nature* - a nature that obeys God and loves others.

So now, when a Christian makes moral and ethical choices the real question isn't "is it lawful?" but "is it helpful?" Keep reading verse 12, "*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful...*" Here's my first concern, "Will this activity deepen my love for Christ, and benefit my neighbor?" The *decision-making filter* that governs a Christian is no longer a set of rules, but love...

Like a leash on a wild dog, the Law was made to choke and stop. Christianity no longer needs the leash because it transforms *the wild dog* into *a child of God*.

Our first concern is to love others and to glorify God.

The question now is not "*Is it lawful*" - *can I get away with it - can I do it and stay out of trouble...* It's more positive - does this help me love you and glorify God?

And there is a second concern... Paul writes, "*All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*" This is also part of the Christian ethic.

If the goal is to be ruled by Christ not Law; then I need to avoid anything that my rival His rule in my life.

If Jesus died to set me free, then a priority for me is to stay free - to avoid anything that might rob me of my freedom, and impose on me another kind of bondage.

A Christian serves but one Master. This means he or she will steer clear of any thing or activity that has the potential of mastering their life. *If I'm not free to put it down; I'm not free to pick it up.* It becomes a sin to me.

Alcohol is the classic example. A Christian is free to drink a glass of wine, as long as they're free to stop after one glass. But if I have a physical dependence; a propensity to be addicted to alcohol; then it becomes a sin for me to take a single sip. *"All things are lawful... but I will not be brought under the power of any..."*

The same is true for video games, or food, or friends, or sports... *If I can't put it down; then I sin to pick it up.*

Here's the only rule for a Christian... **Do what you want as long as it's helpful and it doesn't bring you under its power. It doesn't cause you to **fumble** away your faith, or cause your neighbor's faith to **stumble**.**

The Christian isn't governed *by Law*, he or she is governed *by love - love for God and love for others!*

And this also applies to sexual ethics.

Sex is not about whatever gratifies my own desires. It too, is about glorifying God and loving other people.

There was another slogan the Corinthians adopted to justify their pagan attitudes toward sex. Paul quotes it in verse 13, *"Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them."*

Here's the idea, food is nothing but fuel. What you eat feeds the stomach, until the stomach needs more. Then it's fed again. It's just a biological chain reaction that is eventually brought to a screeching halt by death.

Certainly, there is some value in choosing nutritional foods to eat. A steady diet of red meat and cigars will close your

arteries and poison your lungs - but even the healthiest eater dies in the long run. The *healthy-looking corpse* in one casket, and the *sickly-looking corpse* in the other casket - have one thing in common, they're both *dead*. One is no better than the other.

The slogan the Corinthians were quoting, "*Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them*" conveyed this vital truth. It's not what you put into your mouth that matters to God.

The ancient world was full of dietary and ascetic restrictions. Pagans, Jews, even some Christians made a big deal about abstinence from sex, and kosher diets, and special day observances and feasts.

But the Corinthians were right in exercising their liberty to eat and drink as they pleased. Feasting or fasting - kosher or non-kosher - cholesterol or no-cholesterol - holy day or every day - had zero impact on a person's eternal destiny and fellowship with God.

But the Corinthians had mistakenly adopted the same perspective toward sex. "*Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods.*" Here was their attitude, my stomach craves food, so I eat it - and my body craves sex, so I do it. They assumed that humans are just highly-evolved animals following their natural cravings.

They held the modern mantra, "If it feels good do it!"

The Corinthian logic is like that of people today, "I've got a hunger drive, a thirst drive, a sleep drive, a sex drive - so if it's not a sin to eat anything I want, or drink anything I want, or

sleep anytime I want - then it must not matter to God if I have sex whenever and with whomever I want.” Sex is nothing but a biological function - just like eating, or sleeping, or defecating...

That's faulty thinking, *but it was Corinthian thinking!*

And in the remainder of Chapter 6 Paul straightens out their logic. He writes in verse 13, “**Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.**” First, note that the Greek word used for “*body*” refers to *the body as a whole*. Not just the stomach, or the organs, or glands, or cells. But the entire package: *body, soul, mind, emotions, spirit*.

When man is seen as nothing but a stomach - *a machine* motivated only by cause and effect - or as an animal operating by instinct with no morality or conscience - a cardinal truth has been forgotten...

Men and women were made in God's likeness! We're marred by sin, yes, but we still bear His image.

We have a soul, a spirit. We have free will. We make choices. We're self-determining. We're moral creatures, with a sense of right and wrong. We're more than machine or animal. We're image-bearers of God.

Man is not just a giant stomach! There is more to you than a stomach and what gets put into that stomach.

God created all there is in six days, and said *it was good*. But he saved his final stroke of genius for His prized work. Man was the cap and crown of God's creation - the one aspect made in His very image.

And God gave to humankind dominion over all of His creation. We were made to know God and rule with God. *We're more than stomachs!* We're holy creatures; made to know God, and glorify God, and rule with God.

And as if that were not enough, read verse 14, “**And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.**” Yes, the man made in God’s image fell from his former glory, but God will raise him up again, just as God did Jesus. Your body not only reflects the genius of God, but it will be the canvass on which He works His greatest masterpiece - the resurrection.

The Bible teaches that our rotting flesh will one day be clothed in glory. We’ll have a resurrected body.

Here's Paul's point, God created our bodies and He’ll raise them again in His power. That makes human beings something special to God. That’s why our bodies are “***not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord.***”

It's true, the Lord isn't all that interested in *what you put into your body*. The stomach and what you feed it is temporary. You can take care of your body and live to be 100 - or you can exist off potato chips and drop dead at 40. That's not God’s chief concern. He’s going to resurrect and perfect your body one day anyway.

It’s not *what you PUT IN your body* that matters to God as much as it is *what you do WITH your body!*

How you use your body in this life is what counts!

Paul writes in verse 15, “**Do you not know that your bodies**

are members of Christ?” The Corinthians were saying “what we do with our bodies doesn’t matter.”

Paul says, “*Not so fast, you are the body of Christ!*” We’re “*members of Christ*” - literally, we’re *His limbs*.

As John Philips puts it, “Our hands are to be His hands, our feet are to be His feet, our tongue is to be His tongue. If a sick person’s pillow needs to be fluffed or someone’s brow to be bathed, He has no hands but our hands. If some distant tribe needs to be reached, He has no feet but our feet to go... And if He is to use my body as His body then it must be kept pure.”

And if your body is literally the appendages of Christ, Paul asks, “*Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!*” This is what happens in sex - *two bodies don’t just bounce around and play twister* - something spiritual occurs.

Paul writes, “*Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,”* He says, “*shall become one flesh.*” But he who is joined to the Lord is one *spirit with Him.*” There is a oneness, an intimacy, a merging that happens in sex.

A deep and lingering connectedness occurs when a man and woman engage sexually. It parallels what happens in the spiritual realm when we come to Christ.

Paul says, “*the two shall become one flesh.*”

Unlike eating, drinking, and sleeping - sex among humans carries deep, intense, spiritual connotations.

It’s not like two dogs in heat - just two bodies going at it.

Human sexuality isn't just a physical interaction.

Sex speaks of eternal relationships. It impacts us on our deepest level. Sex isn't just another bodily function. It's a *spiritual act* as well as it is a *physical act*.

One author writes, "Something happens in sex that is far deeper than your feelings might ever recognize.

Even after the most casual and passing sexual encounter, when the man and woman meet afterwards there is a change. There's a deep sense of having shared a mystery together - an intimacy that can never be erased. Even though it was meant to be a one-night stand there remains an indelible stamp on the soul."

Here's a simpler way to say it, "**There is no such thing as casual sex.**" Sex is anything but casual.

The word Paul uses for sex is "*joined.*" The Greek word means "*glued.*" I like to think of sex as super glue. Sex creates a permanent, unbreakable bond.

Try to pull something apart after it's been super glued and it doesn't separate as easily as it was joined.

In fact, there's a ripping and tearing - not just at the point where the two parties once touched - but now the tear is severe. It goes further, deeper. It's more violent.

And this is what happens with sex. It doesn't just interlock two bodies, but whether you realize it or not, it fuses together two souls - two spirits. This is why God reserves sex for marriage. You want a marriage to be sealed together. But when sex occurs outside marriage and the two want to untangle, it's not without damage.

This is why *“living together”* is not a good idea.

Though it's become the thing to do in our culture the results are disappointing - often tragic. Studies show that couples who cohabit report lower levels of satisfaction in their relationship than married couples.

There's more unhappiness and domestic violence.

And if the couple does marry in the future, studies show they're more likely to divorce after living together.

Here's why this happens. Living together is often compared to a **“test drive.”** *You don't buy a car without a road test, so why would you marry a person without trying them out ahead of time?...* Well, that's fine if you're the buyer. *But how does it feel if you're the car?*

As you're being tested, you're giving yourself to this person. You're bonding - *becoming one with them.* But you're giving your soul, without assurances. This isn't unconditional love. You're under pressure to perform.

It's a test. It's about *their* happiness and satisfaction. At any moment you can be dropped off at the dealer.

This is why God reserves sex for marriage. Only where there's a permanent commitment is it safe to squirt the superglue and unleash this powerful bond.

Francis DeVas once wrote, **“There is a tendency to think of sex as something degrading. It is not. It is magnificent, an enormous privilege. But because of that, the rules are tremendously strict and severe.”**

Remember Paul's words, *"your bodies are members of Christ."* We are the body of Christ, so let's be careful how we use His body and with whom we link His body.

Don't prostitute your fidelity and loyalty to Christ for a few cheap thrills and a passing moment of pleasure.

Prostitution was rampant in Corinth. Some of the Corinthian Christians didn't see the crime in continuing to visit prostitutes. Paul is saying isn't it repulsive to you, to think of joining the body of Christ to a harlot?

When a believer logs onto to a pornographic website you've connected the body of Christ to that website...

For a Christian to climb into bed with another man's wife you've pulled the sheets over the body of Christ...

If a believer walks into a strip club, the body of Christ has just been subjected to the seedy and shameful...

When two Christian singles have sex they prostitute the body of Christ. They distort the picture of His devotion to His Church for their own self-gratification...

Participate in sex outside of marriage, and you don't just risk rejection - or STDs - or AIDS - or pregnancy...

More importantly you violate and betray the spiritual union between you and your Lord Jesus. As Paul writes, *"he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him"* - so why would you connect Christ to a prostitute?

Once a teenager asked his grandpa, "Gramps, your

generation didn't have all these venereal diseases. What did you wear to have safe sex?" The ole gramps answered him, "Son, we wore a wedding ring!"

And that's what God is saying to us. You don't have to worry about **safe sex** if you **save sex** for marriage!

That's why Paul exhorts us in verse 18, "**Flee sexual immorality...**" Notice, he doesn't say, "*Take a strong stand against sexual immorality*" or "*Face and fight off sexual temptation.*" No, Paul is much more realistic. He says, "**flee,**" The word means, "*continually flee.*"

Here's how to deal with sexual temptation, *don't sit there, and fight - just split from there, and take flight.*

Today, we live in a sex-saturated society. Temptation is everywhere and easily accessible. But Paul knows our biggest problem is not our environment, *it's us!*

My flesh is feeble and prone to temptation. Thus, the solution is to remove myself from the temptation.

Here's what I always taught my teenagers. It applies to adults as well - "**Time + Opportunity = Trouble.**"

If you're spending time with a person of the opposite sex, just make sure there's no *opportunity*. Natalie's boyfriends could spend as much *time* with her as they wanted, as long as it was in the living room watching football with me... If there is lots of *time*, then you need to eliminate any *opportunity* for hanky-panky.

And if there's *opportunity*, you better make it brief. Don't give it any *time*... For where there's both time and opportunity, I don't care how strong a Christian you are -

leave Franklin Graham and Beth Moore in a room long enough - and there'll eventually be trouble!

Don't give the devil an opportunity. Don't let him get a foot in the door. Preserve your integrity at all costs.

Recall the story of Joseph. He was a young man, a handsome man. He was the chief aid for an Egyptian official named Potiphar. Joseph's job required him to work out of an office in Potiphar's house. And that's where he caught the eye of a desperate housewife.

One day, Mrs. Potiphar cleared out all the staff. No one was home, but Joseph. She was wearing an item she'd bought out of the Victoria Secrets catalogue, when she dropped her bathrobe right in front of him.

Nobody was home. Who would ever know? She grabbed Joseph - started undressing him. Joseph's pulse was racing - his hormones were surging. She invited him, "**Lie with me.**" *And what did Joseph do?*

Genesis 39 tells us, "**He left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.**" *He didn't let her down gently.*

He wasn't concerned for her feelings. For the sake of God's reputation and his integrity he needed to get out of Dodge as quick as he could. He tucked tail and ran.

When temptation makes a pass at you recall *Paul's words* and *Joseph's example*, "**Flee sexual immorality.**"

Which brings us to the final slogan the Corinthians were using to justify their immorality. Paul writes in verse 18, "**Every sin that a man does is outside the body...**" Here's a more

modern way to say it, "how can it be wrong if we're not hurting anybody?" As if the only sins are acts that cause physical harm to another man.

When the Corinthians spouted, *"Every sin that a man does is outside the body..."* They were in essence saying, *"Oh, God doesn't mind if we hook up for sex...We're just having a fling... Letting off some steam..."*

If everyone involved was a consenting adult the Corinthians didn't consider it a sin. *A real sin was stealing a late model chariot, or mugging a person in the park and taking their wallet - certainly not sex.*

There are people who are serial fornicators. They go from conquest to conquest... Or the homosexual who comes out of the closet and declares his pride... and because the consequences of their choices seem to only impact themselves no one is willing to call it "sin."

Instead, it's *the American way*. As long as my rights don't infringe on your rights, *we're all free to be...*

We take *God's verdict* out of the equation. We really are *sexual atheists*. No one values God's wisdom - His perspective. *How could a victimless crime be a sin?*

In fact, people try to justify their sin with statements like, *"I've never felt closer to God..."* or *"I've never been this spiritually alive. I feel such peace..."*

I've even heard people refer to their sexual immorality as *God's will*. *"We pray with each other. Hey, God put us together." No God didn't.* An immoral relationship is not His will, and to say so is blasphemy!

Notice how Paul defines sin in verse 18, “Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.”

Some sins are outside the body, but sexual sin is against your own soul. It's ultimately, spiritual suicide.

It's the slow deterioration of dignity and self-worth.

The truth is, sexual sin is a crime against many people... *The partner in the liaison... Their family... If they're single, their future spouse... If you're a Christian, it's a sin against the Church and the cause of Christ... Society as a whole... Ultimately, God Himself.*

But Paul says sexual immorality is also a sin “*against your own body.*” Even a single person who's gotten involved in pornography - the quintessential “*victimless crime*” - can't say he or she isn't hurting anybody.

Even if you ignore the people producing the porn, *you're still hurting yourself and your own psyche.*

A person's identity is tied to their sexuality. Maleness and femaleness is a part of it, but it goes deeper. Our capacity to reproduce ourselves is bound up in our sexuality. The sexual side of us represents who we are.

That's not true of other bodily functions. What I put in my stomach sustains me, but it has nothing to do with multiplying my likeness, and perpetuating myself.

That's why you can watch me eat, and though it might feel weird, it has no impact on either of us.

Yet if you saw me naked, we'd both blush. We'd be

embarrassed - *among other emotions... It would creep you out.* But we'd all agree sexuality is a bigger deal.

This is why every time you're intimate with someone you give a part of yourself away. You break off a little chunk of yourself that you can never get back. As Paul would put it, *you share your spirit with that person.*

And when you give yourself away with no guarantee of high return - it only cheapens and degrades you.

This is one reason why Paul says sexual sin is a *“sin against your own body.”* Allow yourself to be *used as someone else's pacifier or plaything* over and over, rather than be *valued as a person* - it devastates your dignity. It eats away at your sense of self-worth.

No wonder we have a whole generation of people today who struggle with a lack of self-worth and dignity.

Illicit sex produces some *enjoyment* and *excitement*, but it doesn't provide *enrichment*. That's why God created sex. It's purpose is to enrich marital love.

I like what Warren Wiersbe writes, *“Sex outside of marriage is like a man robbing a bank: he gets something, but it is not his, and he will one day pay for it... Sex within marriage can be like a person putting money into a bank: there is safety, security, and he will collect dividends.”* In other words, sexual immorality is a rip-off, whereas sex in marriage is an investment.

Verse 19, *“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God,*

and you are not your own?" Paul has already asserted that *your body is not your body.*

If you're a Christian your body belongs to Jesus. We're His members... Isn't ironic that our world today says just the opposite. **"It's my body and none of your business"** or **"It's my body, my choice."** But it's neither.

Here Paul tells us, we ***"are not our own!"***

In closing, Paul gives two reasons why our body is not ours... First, verse 19, ***"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?"***

The OT Temple was God's dwelling place on earth. It was His habitation. The Temple was *God's house!*

It had but *one owner* and everything that went on in and around the Temple had but *one purpose* - and that was to bring glory, and honor, and pleasure to God.

Read the OT, what infuriated God, and brought down His wrath, was when His people brought idols into the Temple courts... This is what happens when we commit sexual immorality, and sin against our body, we bring idols into the Temple where God Himself dwells...

And there's a second reason your body is not your own. Verse 20, ***"For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."*** This is Paul's strongest argument for sexual purity. Your body is not your own because it was purchased at a very high cost - *by the blood of Jesus.*

Do you want the price God paid to go to waste?

Realize, His blood was spilt - not just to pay your debt of sin. I've heard it said, "*Jesus died for my sins.*"

Not really. I know what you mean, but Jesus doesn't want your *sins*. He died to pardon your sin, so He can have a relationship with you! *What Jesus wants is you!*

This AM, I want us to take communion, and remind ourselves we were bought at a price. Our body belongs to Jesus!.. It's for His glory - *not sexual immorality.*