

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

I can do what I want! I don't think there is a parent who hasn't been confronted with that statement from their child at some point in time, usually when the child isn't so much a child, but a youth who suddenly thinks they are more grown up than they are.

I can do what I want! I guess that some people just never grow up, because that is the mantra of some many people in this world today. We hear people talk so much about their freedom and their rights. We want freedom of speech, which is an important part of our democratic system. But that freedom is abused when pornographers hide behind that freedom to exploit others, including children. That freedom is abused when riotous mobs storm the US capitol, because they have their own idea of truth and right.

Again and again people cry that they have the right to do as they please. It comes up with life issues, when we hear that the right to choose whether or not to continue a pregnancy is greater right than the right of the conceived child to continue to live. “It's my body, and I'll do what I want with it!” “If it feels good, do it!” I don't think it is just coincidence that the most played secular song at funerals—or more precisely what we call celebrations of life, is the Frank Sinatra song, “*My Way*”. It all sounds so much like the Corinthians, who said, “*All things are lawful for me.*” But is that true? Can we simply do what we want with our lives and our bodies? Paul responds ver quickly to that misguided belief that all things are permissible by noting that not all things are beneficial or helpful. More than that, we need to remember what Paul tells us in our text today: *You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

You aren't your own. You belong to God. That is true, whether people believe in Him or not. God is the author of all creation. The psalmist says; “*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*” (Psalm 139:13, ESV) God may work through the reproductive process, but it is still His work. We are still His creation. Again, the Scriptures declare: “*The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.*” (Psalm 24:1, ESV) If that isn't enough, Paul also reminds us that the God who created us paid the ultimate price that we might be His own. We belong to Christ. He bought us with the price of His own blood. He died on that cross to redeem us from sin and Satan. That word redeem means to buy back. God buys back what is His. He calls us to a new life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In that life, He calls us to glorify Him by the things we do and by the choices we make.

But the world's rallying cry still rings out: “I can do what I want!” In our rationalistic, relativistic and unbelieving world, the clear words of Holy Scripture don't matter to many people, including many who claim to be part of God's church. Even within the visible church, there are many who are eager to accept what God calls abominations. They often do it in the name of love—for, after all, God is love, so we shouldn't say or do anything that keeps people from being what they want to be, or doing whatever they want to do. There are also those who mistakenly believe that we are wiser and more enlightened in the true ways of the world than were the biblical writers, so we set aside the Bible's truth for the so-called wisdom of the world. We often see the world telling the church what to believe, rather than the church standing firm on what God calls us to believe.

That was definitely true in Corinth. Much like our world today, these early Christians lived in a culture that truly did have an “if it feels good, do it” approach to life. Pagan temples even provided the services of cult prostitutes with whom the devotees

could “worship.” They were strongly influenced by the Greek philosophy of dualism that separated the spirit and the physical. The spiritual was good, but the physical was not good and so it really didn’t matter. What happened on the inside—in the spirit, in the heart as we would say—that mattered. The things of the body really didn’t matter. Yes, they believed that all things were lawful, as long as the spirit within them was still pure.

Sadly, the devil works so well through many of the teachings, attitudes and philosophies of the world to overwhelm us with his lies. Do you remember what the devil first asked Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden? ***Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”*** (Genesis 3:1 - ESV) That is exactly what he still asks in so many ways. “Did God really say it is wrong to abort babies?” “Did God really say that it was wrong to live together before marriage?” “Did God really say homosexuality is wrong?” “Did God really say we shouldn’t gamble?” “Did God really say we shouldn’t lie or cheat or hate?” Yes, God has spoken. His commandments guide us in what is right in His sight. His Word is clear. It is our lack of adherence to that word that creates the problem. It is the childish, self-centred and self-righteous heart that says, “I can do what I want!”

Most parents have had been confronted by their children at some point in time who are upset that—surprise!—mom and dad don’t accept that anything goes. “But everyone else is doing it!” How many of you heard the same thing I heard: “well, if Bobby was going to jump off a cliff, would you jump off, too?” My dad was very blunt: “I don’t care what everyone else does. You’re my child, and you’ll do as I say”.

That is Paul’s focus. You are the child of God. Paul isn’t setting out a plan for social reform as such. He is speaking to the people of God—to the redeemed, precious, baptized and forgiven children of a loving Father who only works for the good of His children. ***Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?*** We belong to God—both body and soul. It matters what we do and how we live, both body and soul.

I was watching the world-famous magicians, Penn and Teller do a trick recently in which they talked about subliminal messaging. That was an advertising concept that pushed subtle, virtually imperceptible images into our minds as they flashed by on the screen. Even though we may not be conscious of them, they can lead us to make choices that flow from their influence. We cannot avoid the pervasive influence of our society’s attitudes and actions. It is there in the movies we watch. It is in the music we hear. It fills commercials; it fills social media. The only way for us to overcome this influence is to turn to the Lord, and to find His forgiving love guarding our hearts and our lives. We remember that we are His. He loves us, redeems us and sets us free through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Instead of simply giving in to our sinful hearts that want us to do whatever feels good, we remember that we are not our own. We know we were bought with a price—and not just any price, but the price of the life of the eternal Son of God on the cross. ***You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.***

I can do what I want - Not! There are those things that hurt us, that lead us away from God. The price of permissiveness is very clear in Scripture. Sooner or later, it will lead us to what we deserve, which is eternal death in hell. But, thankfully, there is forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In that forgiveness we find the strength to draw ever closer to Him to serve Him in love and faithfulness. We use our bodies, given to us by Him, to honour and glorify Him. And what joy we find as we grow ever closer to the Lord who has united us with Himself. The price of permissiveness is to lose ourselves, even while we think we are having the time of our lives. That is the devil’s great treachery. But when we cling to the Lord who has bought us and united us with Him, we come to know the wonderful blessings and benefits that are ours in the Saviour, who gives us life in its fulness, both now and forevermore. Amen.