

Not Enslaved By Anything
(1st Corinthians 6:12-20)
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The Epiphany light of Christ cannot be confined to ancient history. It is sometimes easy to get the impression that being stuck in history is what the Church is doing in that our Epiphany Gospels recount such events as the Magi following the miraculous star, the baptism of our Lord at which the Father spoke from heaven and the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ in the form of a dove, the wedding at Cana and our Lord's first miracle in changing the water to wine, and of course the glorious transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of these were "epiphanies" in and through which the glory of God was revealed in and upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The teaching is clear: this is no mere man, but the very Son of God, true God, true man! He is the God-man, He is the Creator of heaven and earth, He is our brother, and He is the head of the Church!

But again the epiphanies cannot be exclusively relegated to the past. The light of Christ showing Christ to the world continues to shine, so we have Scriptures such as these that make this truth abundantly clear:

Matthew 5:14-16: *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

Jesus Christ is indeed the *living* God, and as *the* Light of the World, Jesus intends also to shine today, so that His epiphanies are not limited to history. They include this time and this place! They include *your* life! Point blank: God intends to shine through you! But given this, doesn't it make sense that that which fights against God, would also fight against your ability to be the modern-day epiphanies of Jesus that you are called to be?! Yes of course it makes sense and furthermore there is a ferocious spiritual battle that includes enemies of God trying to keep you from shining the light of Christ.

1st Corinthians 6:12-20 is perhaps one of the most practical Scriptures in making you aware of what is capable of shutting down the light of Christ inside of you and in your life. It is a common problem and it is – make no mistake about it – a problem that relates to your sin, the influences of the world and the evil one. The problem is often purported to be "addiction" in the realm of psychology, a "societal ill" in the realm of sociology, or just "the way of the world" in the realm of culture, especially our country, the United States of America. But all of these are sometimes ways of re-labeling exactly what we are being warned about here in 1st Corinthians chapter 6.

This spiritual threat is summed up by St. Paul: it is the possibility that something in this world could "enslave" you. This is why St. Paul is so adamantly against the possibility: ***"All things are lawful for me,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything (v 12)."*** He then goes on to mention food and more

importantly, he goes on to mention sex. The list of course could have been much longer than just these two things, but the point is that God is teaching through St. Paul that we have the potential – the constant and real potential – to allow something in life to master us, to grab hold of us...our affections and desires; our alliances and our commitments; our so-called “needs” and “wants” so that before we know it, we act, live and breathe as if we are completely attached to that thing. And we begin to treat that thing as that which is necessary for us to go on.

When this happens, dear Christian, we have on our hands on a false god, an idol. And these false gods and idols come in all shapes and sizes! They are as varied as human personality. It behooves us to step back and conduct an inventory of our own lives. What is it in our lives that we are tempted to allow to master us? Don’t underestimate what those things may be! For myself, I even need to consider how something like my theological library can get out of hand, though I think as I get older this is less of an issue. However, back in the day when my older children were just little babies, I was tested to say the least! Sometimes they would crawl around and they would sometimes make a b-line to one of my books. There were known to do things like grab a pretty valuable book and either rip out a page or put a crayon to it. The first couple of times this happened, you would think the sky was falling! In a nutshell: I was over-reacting. At the end of the day, it was just a book.

I’ve shared the story before, but one time the test went up a notch: one of my little girls just old enough to walk and made it into the garage where our brand-new mini-van was sitting. Ingeniously she got a hold of stone and figured out that she was able to sketch lines into the paint of the brand-new mini-van; the side, sliding door made a great surface and it was so shiny! When I walked into the garage I almost started choking and had to take a deep breath! What happened next must have been from God. Though I was tempted to go nuts, I didn’t. Instead, she turned around and saw me. All by herself she got this guilty look on her face. When I saw that, my heart melted, I smiled and picked her up as I calmly explained that her drawing needed to be confined to paper. All was well. I actually survived. Everything was going to be ok. Yes, we are supposed to manage and care for those things the Lord puts into our lives. Our stewardship counts! But on the other hand, we are also called not to be mastered by anything!

But things like books and cars are just the top of the cake. What if we get to the point when a bottle becomes our life? When it just feels that we can’t make it through the day without drinking? What if sexual addiction becomes real? When a person goes back over and over again to this objectivising habit feeling as though they cannot stop? What if it goes even further and invades hallowed and sacred relationships? The world wants to rationalize: “How can anything that feels so right, be so wrong?” This is one of the most popular ideas of someone being on the cusp of losing their soul.

We have freedom in Christ. You don’t have Old Testament dietary laws binding you. Go forth and enjoy your steak and potato; have your shrimp, eat your chocolate cake, and if you’re able and old enough, enjoy your beer or wine (after all, the Lord lists in His Word several legitimate reasons for alcohol like celebrations -- e.g. weddings -- medicinal purposes (1st Timothy 5:23), helping those who are grieving (Proverbs 31:6-7), and of course in the reception of the Holy Sacrament). Great! Enjoy your freedom, but the Lord’s message is don’t let any these things master you!

Know where to draw the line. I was at a restaurant that advertised a chocolate desert called "Death By Chocolate," and being the theologian that I am realized that that was a real possibility! The same is true for other things, but the Lord is good and has given us ways for us to be protected. Take for example the area of sexuality: the Lord came up with this great plan thousands of years ago to protect us called "marriage"! His call is clear: "Honor it!" Look at Hebrews 13: ***"Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous (v 4)."*** In the very next verse the Lord warns against "the love of money" and commands us to be content with what we have. The Lord gives us these words to protect us because He cares for us & also because He wishes to have His light shine through you!

Still, if we stopped here, we would leave ourselves in anxiety and dread. How can we possibility face all of our temptations and remain standing? We are led back to Philip's testimony to Nathanael: ***"We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (John 1:45)."*** Later Nathanael in realizing Jesus' power confessed to Christ: ***"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel (John 1:49)!"*** What is especially important to point out about our Lord in relation to our consideration today is that He took on our flesh. Yes, He was God, but don't forget, He was also a man! So – as a man – was there anything that caused our Lord to struggle? Of course there was and on account of His perfect purity – His impeccability – He was without sin, *but* that did not change the very painful REAL struggle He faced for you and me. As a real human being He knew the pain of rejection; He understood the temptations we face; and He entered our world and flesh so that nothing would master Him on His journey to save you.

But of all the things we face with the potential to master us, isn't it universally acknowledged that there is one thing that always ends up mastering us: death?! Our Lord, however, made no exceptions to what He faced for you. The author of life permitted Himself to die. Like you, as a man He thirsted for life -- begging the Father to remove the cup of His impending crucifixion -- and yet He would not permit anything that you must face to get by Him. In the end, even that potential master He did not avoid. And like every other potential master He faced, every, single one failed to conquer Him; not a one of them could master Him...not food, not possessions, not drink, not sex...not even death. Not a one!

In the end, Jesus was faithful and obedient to the Father and because He was, you dear Christian are saved from anything that threatens to master you. *Anything! You are saved because nothing mastered your Savior Jesus, but the very will of God, period!*

You are now born-again in Christ. Christ lives in you and the new life He's gifted you with continues. You are free in the Gospel of Christ, you may do and have anything, but you will not be mastered by any of it! You no longer live for yourself, but for Christ who lived and lives for you! Therefore, nothing is more important to you than the grace of God in Christ. Nothing else competes and in comparison to your Only Master, the Lord Jesus, nothing else even comes close so that even the suggestion that something else would master you is ludicrous...it would be like trading in gold & diamonds for trash. Therefore you know the divine exception to the rule: you do after all have one Master at the end of the day; you *will* allow yourself (by the grace of God)

to be mastered by the One who loved you more than His own life! Your master and compassionate friend is Jesus. You live for Him now and His light shines in you because He is the glorious Lord who has lived for you and by His wounds you are healed for all the times your flesh has taken you the other way. For all the times you have been mastered by anything other than God, God has by the blood of Jesus mastered all accusation, all condemnation and He has defeated these for you and you are forgiven! Again, you have but one Master, and His Name is Jesus. Live for Him and know that since He is your Master, nothing else can claim that position in your life! Because He holds you in His loving embrace; all other false masters are powerless to take His life from you. Rejoice and let your light shine!