

Exousiazō

By Pastor Greg
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1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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In *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Christopher Gardner rises to become a Stock Broker with Dean Witter. In this true story, Christopher loses his income, loses his house, his wife leaves him, and he ends up trying to raise his son while living in the street. Penniless, homeless, and hopeless, Christopher wonders, "It was right then that I started thinking about the Declaration of Independence and the part about our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And I remember thinking how did Thomas Jefferson know to put the pursuit part in there? That maybe happiness is something that we can only pursue and maybe we can actually never have it, no matter what. How did he know that?"

I find myself in the middle of a battle. According to my government I have certain rights. Ever since I was a boy in Jacksonville Elementary I've been taught that I have the freedom to pursue the things that bring me happiness. I remember learning this, then marching home to exercise my rights to the cookie jar. Mom, it seemed, did not believe I had that right. However, once mom was no longer the authority in my life, I was free to pursue the things that made me happy. And it looks like I caught happiness one too many times.

Anyway, I find myself facing a battle because this teaching about freedom and about rights permeates our society. It's taught to us and sold to us. We are encouraged, even stimulated to pursue whatever and whomever we please. And as a Christian I'm finding it very hard to leave the teachings of our culture behind, especially when our culture continually bombards me with the attitude that I deserve happiness; that I should embrace anything that makes me happy.

The reason I share this is because I think it might help us identify with what these Christians living in Corinth were facing. As I've said before, the sexual sin in this city was horrendous. The very religion of the city (the worship of Aphrodite) was nothing but prostitution in the name of religion! And it was out of this culture that these Christians were rescued. *"Such were some of you; but you were washed,*

*but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”*¹ (1 Corinthians 6:11). But Paul argues that they should no longer be bound by their former life. They should not let the culture hold them captive.

Just like our culture today, the Corinthian culture talked about liberty, about freedom of choice; a freedom to do as they please, and the freedom to do whatever they pleased. And this teaching had the same effect on them as it does on us today; it created an arrogant, self-centered society; a society that elevated rights above responsibility. But Paul points out that not only does a Christian have a responsibility toward others, but they have a responsibility toward themselves as well. (**Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**).

Here's his concern. Who is the master here? Who had the authority (or Exousiazo; *ex-oo-see-ad'-zo*), the culture or the Christian? To Paul, it seemed that these Christians had not mastered their old life, but instead had allowed their old life to still be master over them. I can understand his concern. Sometimes the way we Christians live is no different than the rest of the world. And it's pretty obvious that we've allowed the teachings of our culture to still exercise authority (Exousiazo) over us as well.

I know Paul addresses sexual sin here. And he is right. There is no sin nearly as damaging to a person than a sin involving sex outside of God's boundaries (relational, gender and species). But buried deep within this teaching is the understanding that the only thing that should master us; the only thing that should hold authority over us is our Lord Jesus.

Just as the Corinthian's were to flee from what held them captive, we too must do the same. You and I are bombarded daily with the idea that we deserve to be happy; we deserve whatever or whoever can make US happy. But every time we give in to those fleshly desires and passions of ours, they master us; we are still slaves in bondage. Paul's argument is to remind us that our "*body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in (us) and was given to (us) by God?*"² (Verse 19).

¹*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (1 Co 6:11). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

I guess the next big question would be why, why does all of this matter? If a person loves God, why does He care, and why should anyone else care what they do? They go to church, they worship God, they love their neighbor, they pay their taxes, and they certainly don't cheat others. They claim that Jesus has purchased their freedom; that they are no longer under bondage. So what's the harm in pursuing the things that make them happy? Well, this person has forgotten that God is just as concerned about what goes on in the flesh as He is about what goes on in the heart. I've got news for these people. They're just as bound by sin today as they were yesterday. Isn't it true that if Christ broke the shackles of sin that held us captive yesterday there should be evidence of that freedom today? Unless of course we were holding back. Unless there are some things that still hold us captive. If we continue to live today as we did yesterday, we have not truly been freed. We have not mastered the old; it still is master over us.

In this Corinthian church there were some who gave Jesus their heart, but the rest they kept for themselves. This is why Paul concludes, *"You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body"*.³ (Verse 20). Paul needed to remind these people that Christians are to glorify God with their bodies. This means the way they care for the body, the way they dress the body, the places they take the body, the deeds they do in the body, because they no longer own their bodies. This is an important lesson. Most of us fall into the same trap. We give God our heart (at least on Sunday's) but keep the rest for ourselves. And the parts we keep we use with liberty and freedom.

It seems too many Christians today feel free to say what they like, do what they like, act any way they like, and put themselves in any situation that might bring them pleasure or happiness. After all, that is their freedom; their right. But that's also the way the world thinks. Tell me, are we not called to be different? Are we not to call Jesus Lord and Master? To hold on to the things of this world even after singing "I Surrender All" is to demonstrate who our master really is. And in case you didn't know, there are only two masters in this world. One is Jesus Christ, the other one is not you.

³Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.