

*12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. 13 "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." 17 But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.*

What do you like about Christ Lutheran? When I asked that question recently this is what I heard:

I like that no one tells me how I must think.

I like that we do not all need to be the same.

I like that I can be myself and no one tries to change me.

In short what I heard is that the people who gather here treasure their Christian freedom. We are made right with God through faith in Christ – not through our works. All who believe in Christ are welcome to belong here.

In the congregation in Corinth freedom was a central theme: "All things are lawful for me," they bragged. They knew that there was no condemnation for those who were in Christ Jesus. One thing mattered – belonging to Christ.

So some in that congregation ate meat from animals that had been slaughtered as part of the worship of other gods – maybe because the meat was then sold at a discount – or maybe they did it to show just how free they were in Christ. .

One member of the congregation took his father's wife – his stepmother – and married her. He was proud of it – "All things are lawful for me.

Some participated in pagan worship that involved temple prostitutes – because the gods being worshipped did not really exist it did not matter – all things are lawful for me.

"All things are lawful for me." they bragged. I belong to Christ, I can do anything.

When Paul writes to the Corinthians he agrees with their statement, “All things are lawful for me” but he adds to it. Yes, “all things are lawful for me but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me but I will not be dominated by anything.”

For Paul just because you can do it does not mean you should. Will it be beneficial? Will it enslave me?

His words are an invitation for you and me to think about our lives – what is beneficial – what is it that makes us kinder, more patient, more gentle, more generous. We are free to pursue those things.

What is not beneficial? I find that when I am in a hurry in my car that I drive less carefully – that my mind is full of unkind thoughts toward a slow driver in front of me.

I find that when I am critical about the people I encounter, when I complain about them, that at the end of the day I do not feel as good about myself.

Or I think about what enslaves me – dominates me. I find that the more entertainment is in my day the more I want. It becomes like an addiction. One weekend I went to a play and saw a movie and watched part of a game on TV and found myself thinking that I had not had any time to enjoy myself. I had been entertained but not refreshed. Not renewed.

It is a good thing that at Christ Lutheran we do not spend a lot of time sitting in judgement of one another. When someone sins this congregation has not pulled back or pointed accusing fingers but receives the person with open arms. That is a wonderful expression of the grace of God in Christ. But I do wish we did encourage one another to grow more often. Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you which you have from God and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”

You and I are not the owners of ourselves, we belong to Christ.

The first time I remember that passage being quoted was when I was in high school. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit – do not smoke. That was the message.

With that kind of thinking the Christian faith can be reduced to - a set of rules about morality. Soon everyone is being watched by one another and sitting in judgement of one another and God's grace in Jesus Christ is lost to us. But how we live our lives does matter – we do belong to the one who gave his life for us – his Spirit has taken up residence in you.

You belong to Christ. Christ wants more for you and me than our becoming addicted to entertainment. Christ wants us to be people who take time for prayer, time to thank God, time to learn, time to give ourselves to our neighbors in need. Christ wants every beneficial thing for you and for me.

For Christ loves us. For those you love you want the very best.

Christ wants you to be the very best you you can be. He sets us all free for that. Amen.