Journal of Research for Christianity in China (ISSN: 3068-479X)
中国基督教研究（ISSN：3068-479X）| CCSpub.cc/JRCC
No. 26, June 2026, pp. 1-33

"All Things Are Lawful"? Paul's Reframing of Freedom Through the Lens of Body (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

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Abstract: The relationship between the perception of human body and the understanding of freedom was a contentious issue in early Christian churches. This paper examines Paul's reframing of freedom from the lens of the body in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Through a three-tiered methodology—social-historical analysis, rhetorical analysis, and exegetical study of the Corinthian texts—this paper first reconstructs the Corinthians' theology of body and traces its intellectual roots in the dualistic view of body in Stoicism and the similar dualistic traits manifested in Proto-Gnosticism. I argue that Paul, using the rhetoric of diatribe, challenges this dualistic and individualistic view of body, rejecting its disembodied moral implications and articulating instead a holistic and communal vision of freedom grounded in the embodied participation within the body of Christ. Finally, by engaging in a dialogue between Paul's reframing of freedom and the Confucian concept of freedom, this paper proposes a constructive hermeneutical bridge for interpreting Pauline concept of freedom in Chinese cultural contexts.

Keywords: 1 Corinthians 6, Paul, Body, Freedom

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.29635/JRCC.202606_(26).0001

The concept of human body (σῶμα) is central to Pauline theology. In the Corinthian church, the relationship between body and freedom was one of the primary sources of conflict. Their misconceptions about human body and freedom caused multiple communal issues. This paper focuses on 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, where Paul refutes the Corinthians on the issue of sexual immorality. This passage reveals the Corinthians' theology of body to be both dualistic, detaching body from spirit, and individualistic, prioritizing personal benefits over communal identity.

To investigate this conflict, this paper employs a three-tiered methodology that connects the Greco-Roman world behind the text and the text itself. First, a social-historical analysis reconstructs the problem, tracing the Corinthians' dualistic views of the body to their intellectual roots in Stoicism and the similar traits manifested in Proto-Gnosticism. Second, a rhetorical analysis examines Paul's rhetorical strategy in the text, identifying his use of diatribe to counter the Corinthian slogans. Third, these insights are integrated into the exegetical analysis of the texts that lead to Paul's theological conclusions. The advantage of this integrated approach overcomes the limitations of singular methods. It not only avoids a pure history of religions analysis, which often is detached from the biblical texts, but also avoids a de-contextualized literary reading, which can be ahistorical. This method ensures that the historical problem of the Corinthian church is tightly linked to Paul's specific rhetorical and textual strategy, thereby grounding his theological conclusions.

Integrating these methods, this paper argues that Paul, using the rhetoric of diatribe, challenges the Corinthian church's dualistic and individualistic view of body. In doing so, Paul advocates for a holistic and communal perception of the body. This holistic view follows Rudolf Bultmann's argument that Paul's Hebrew-rooted anthropology: "Man does not *have* a soma, he *is* a soma."[1] This suggests the indivisible whole of the body to describe human existence. Thus, body refers

1 Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Volume 1, trans. Kendrich Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1951–1955), p. 194.

to the whole person rather than the material substance in contrast to the incorporeal part of the soul. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul not only rejects the Corinthians' disembodied moral implications; instead, he articulates a new vision of freedom grounded in the embodied participation within the body of Christ. Furthermore, this paper proposes a hermeneutical reading of Paul's concept of freedom as it is received in Chinese contexts, engaging in a dialogue with the Confucian view of freedom.

This paper is structured accordingly. Section one briefly introduces the Greco-Roman philosophical trends that give rise to the dualistic understanding of the human body. Section two traces the Corinthians' dualistic views of the body to their intellectual roots in Stoicism and the similar traits manifested in Proto-Gnosticism. It is followed by section three, a rhetorical and exegetical interpretation of Paul's refutations to the Corinthian slogans in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, highlighting Paul's refutations of their dualistic and individualistic view of body, and his construction of a holistic and communal vision of body and freedom. Section four synthesizes Paul's arguments and formulates his vision of freedom through the lens of the body in this text. The article concludes with the exploration of theological implications of this reading, proposing a Pauline-Confucian dialogue as a constructive hermeneutical bridge.

Philosophical Conceptions of the Body in the Greco-Roman World

The concept of body (σῶμα) has been one of the debated themes in Greco-Roman philosophies. Before examining the concept of the body for the Corinthian church and Paul, as reflected in 1 Corinthians, this section situates the Greco-Roman philosophical context that shaped their views on the body. By providing a brief survey of philosophical views of Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and Stoicism, I highlight their discussion on the relationship between soul and body as the background for the Stoic and Proto-Gnostic devaluation of the body in favor of the spirit or soul—a key issue Paul directly addresses in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

The theme of the relationship between body and spirit/soul, particularly the question of the soul's superiority or primacy, emerges in early Greek philosophy, notably in Plato and Aristotle, though with different emphases. Plato engages with discourse concerning human body and soul in multiple works. In Plato's *Phaedo*, the concept of body (σῶμα) is perceived by human senses, thus subject to change and perish (*Phaedo* 81C; 82B). The body is the antithesis of the soul, which belongs to the realm of mind, and it is invisible, divine, immortal, and wise (79C; 81A).[1] Plato conceives human soul and body along "a spectrum of essences", with the lowest form of soul inseparably mingled with the body, while the highest form of soul is closely associated with the divine realm (*Timaeus* 86D).[2]

Aristotle discusses the relationship between body and soul from a framework of form/content dichotomy (*Physis,* 1.1.403b).[3] He is more concerned with the dichotomy of form and content, so for him "the soul is the 'form' to the body's 'content' or 'matter'." [4] Although Aristotle acknowledges the soul being incorporeal (ἀσώματος), he also treats it as composed of subtle material substance.[5] Accordingly, souls are "the powers of and in bodies", and it is through the "ensouled "(living) body that humans desire and move. [6]

Epicureans consider "all entities that act or are acted upon are bodies."[7] Consequently, they do not differentiate between the categories of mind and body based on their corporeality, as they regard the soul and mind to be corporeal as well.[8] Indeed, throughout the Epicurean texts, mind and soul are contrasted with matter that is void and nothing. Thus, Epicurean philosophers posit that the

1 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (Yale University Press, 1995), p. 11.

2 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 11.

3 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 8.

4 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 8.

5 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 8.

6 J. L. Ackrill, *Aristotle the Philosopher* (Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 59.

7 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 9.

8 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 9.

concept of body includes entities considered as incorporeal by other philosophers, such as air and water.[1]

Building on these philosophical foundations, the Stoics developed a distinctive view in which the rational spirit (pneuma) governs bodily impulses.[2] The Stoics acknowledge the distinction between body and soul, yet their definition of the body as an "existent" makes the soul also exist as a "body."[3] They believe that the universe was a kind of "body," a living being governed by spirit and mind/reason.[4] In other words, they consider all that "exists" as corporeal, yet the entities that do not exist are regarded as incorporeal.[5] As Stoicism gained popularity around the first century C.E., it had direct influences on the early Christian communities in the Mediterranean world. At the same time, Platonism was revived under the influence of Stoic ethics through the works of Middle Platonists, including Plutarch and Apuleius.[6] It became a popularized Platonism that bears similarities to Proto-Gnosticism, emphasizing "the soul as immortal and in bondage to the body, and a disparagement of the material world."[7] As a result, these discussions about the relationship between the body and soul permeated into the cultural discourses of the early Christian churches, including the Corinthian church. In the subsequent section, I will further illustrate these influences on the church in Corinth.

1 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 9.

2 For the influences of Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus on the development of Stoic thoughts, see A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.1-106. For the similarities between Stoics and other contemporary philosophies, see A. A. Long, "Soul and Body in Stoicism," *Phronesis* (Leiden, Netherlands) 27, nos. 1–2 (1982): pp. 34–57.

3 Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 137 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 48–49.

4 Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ*, 57.

5 Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, p. 9.

6 Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd edition (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 387.

7 Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, p. 307.

The Corinthian View of Body and Freedom

The text of 1 Corinthians is one of Paul's occasional letters that respond to the issues and problems that have arisen in Christian communities. Throughout the letter, from 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21, Paul addresses the causes of divisions within the church, represented by the church's claiming allegiance to one of four groups: Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), or Christ.[1] Starting in chapter 5, Paul begins addressing moral issues within the church. In Paul's eyes, the Corinthians' views on the body have created numerous disputes on bodily matters within the church. The issues pertaining to the human body in 1 Corinthians include incest (1 Cor 5), sexual immorality (1 Cor 6), marriage, singleness, and widowhood (1 Cor 7), the consumption of the food offered at the alters of idols (1 Cor 8, 10), the practice of head covering in worship (1 Cor 11), the Eucharist (1 Cor 11), and the bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15).[2] Thus, the primary point of contention between the Corinthians and Paul in 1 Cor 6 is fundamentally about human body, albeit its primary issue is sexual immorality. Given the limited scope of this study, this paper examines the texts of 1 Cor 6:12-20 and Paul's reframing of the concept of freedom through his theology of body.[3]

The Corinthians' views on body and freedom are central to their theological claims as outlined in the texts of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Most scholars agree that the Corinthians slogans cited in the Corinthians letter represent Corinthian

1 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 107.

2 The most prominent issue regarding the body is the resurrection. Inferred from Paul's emphasis on the human body's value in resurrection, the Corinthians considered the body to be disposable and irrelevant in resurrection. See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (July 1978), p. 395.

3 For a comprehensive analysis of Paul's usage of the term σῶμα and the theology of body, see Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings*, Arbeiten Zur Geschichte Des Antiken Judentums Und Des Urchristentum 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1971); Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, Society for New Testament Studies 29 (Cambridge: University Press, 1976).

theology.[1] Their slogans have been greatly influenced by various social, cultural, and religious streams in the Greco-Roman society during the 1st century CE. Jay E. Smith identifies several cultural factors that may have shaped the development of the Corinthian slogan in 1 Cor 6:18, including the popular philosophy of Stoicism, parallel concepts in incipient Gnosticism in the Greco-Roman stream, as well as the misunderstood teachings of Jesus.[2] In this section, I will examine the two cultural and religious currents that similarly reflected the Corinthian perspective on body.

The first was Stoicism. As the early Christian churches developed in the Mediterranean, Stoicism gained greater attention and popularity. The Corinthian theological claims on body, as expressed in the Corinthian slogans, exhibit parallels with the ideas espoused by the Stoics. Smith argues that numerous writings by Stoic philosophers, including Epictetus, Cicero, and Marcus Aurelius, illustrate the irrelevance and the indifference of bodily matters to human virtue.[3] They held the view that bodily actions are morally irrelevant to human virtues, emphasizing instead the significance of motives and intentions. Sexual behaviors, as a form of bodily behaviors, are also irrelevant to one's body and morality.[4] As Edward Vernon Arnold correctly summarizes the Stoic view of virtue and their ethics: "Virtue is a state of the mind, a disposition of the soul; it is not an act. Hence,

1 On the determination of Corinthian slogans in 1 Corinthians, see Edward W. Watson and Martin M. Culy, *Quoting Corinthians: Identifying Slogans and Quotations in 1 Corinthians* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018). Watson and Culy identify Corinthian slogans in 1 Cor 6:12, 13, 18. While some scholars, such as David Garland, hold reservations about the slogan hypothesis, this paper concurs with the mainstream view (e.g., Thiselton, Fee) that acknowledges Paul's citation of Corinthian slogans in 1 Cor 6, which offers a convincing explanation for understanding Paul's argument. See David E. Garland, *First Corinthians* (Baker Academic, 2003); Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987).

2 Smith examines the conceptual parallels and the verbal parallelism between Corinthian slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20 and the Greco-Roman culture and Nag Hammadi literature. See Jay E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18," *Journal of Theological Studies* 59, no. 1 (2008), pp. 69-95.

3 Jay E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18," pp. 69-71.

4 Jay E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18," p. 71.

the bent of the mind, its aim, its desire is everything; the performance through the organs of the body is nothing."[1] In light of the evidence presented by Smith, it is possible that the Stoic ethical view, which posits the irrelevance and indifference of the human body to one's virtue and morality, has greatly influenced the development of the Corinthian theological view on the body.[2] This is exemplified in the assertion in 1 Corinthians 6:18b that "every sin that a person commits is outside the body," which will be further illustrated in the next section.

Another cultural and religious trend that was reflected in the Corinthians' perspective on the body was a dualist view of body and soul, which manifests similar traits of Proto-Gnosticism. The Gnostic cosmology is structured by a dualistic worldview of good and evil forces that shape the universe, and Gnostics believe that humans are in a fallen state and subject to the evil forces, the goal of humanity is to "be freed from the fetters of this world (spirit from matter, light from darkness) and so return to their true home in the Kingdom of Light."[3] The Gnostics hold a dualistic view of the relationship between the material and the spiritual, regarding the spirit (πνεῦμα) as superior for its connection to gnosis (γνῶσις). This exact dynamic was at play in Corinth, as Richard Horsley describes:

> …*gnōsis* was closely associated with *sophia*, sometimes as a virtual synonym, sometimes as the content that Sophia provided to her devotees (e.g., Wis 10:10). Thus the wise person dwelling in *Sophia* possessed "knowledge of God" (Philo *Leg*. All. 3.46–48). *Gnōsis* thus referred to a content possessed, as well as to the act of knowing, and was sometimes the theological content of *Sophia*…. Illuminated by *Sophia* and empowered by the Spirit, the Corinthian pneumatic believed that "all things" were authorized for the now

1 Edward Vernon Arnold, *Roman Stoicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), p. 286.

2 Smith also finds the verbal or near verbal parallels between several Stoic texts and the Corinthian slogans throughout 1 Cor 6:12-20, see Jay E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18," pp. 72-76.

3 Kurt Rudolph, "Gnosticism", *The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 2:1033-1040.

wise, mature, reigning individual self.[1]

Scholars have presented a variety of perspectives on the influence of incipient Gnosticism on Corinthian theology.[2] Yet recent scholarship on Gnosticism has challenged Water Schimithals' understanding of Gnosticism by pointing out the anachronism in the argument: Gnosticism as a developed system is a later or even modern construct, making it impossible for it to have influenced the 1st-century Corinthian church.[3] If so, despite the lack of direct impact, the Corinthians' enthusiastic pursuit of knowledge (γνῶσις) still betrays their pursuit of the spiritual over the corporeal, a similar dualist view of the body manifested in Proto-Gnosticism.[4] They view their pneuma-selves as already redeemed, which also leads to a negative view of the human body: they hold contempt for the weakness of the human body and treasure their pneuma that dwells in the vessel of their perishable body. This disparaging view of the human body leads to an ethics that reflects a moral irrelevance and indifference to one's body, an attitude similar to that of the Stoics.[5] Smith identifies conceptual and verbal parallels

1 Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 94, p. 117.

2 For example, Thiselton writes, "In Paul's day a process was probably in motion which would end as developed Gnosticism, and traces of this trend can be found in embryonic form in the theology of some at Corinth." Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.268. On the Proto-Gnostic parallels in the Corinthian church, see Robert McLachlan Wilson, "How Gnostic Were the Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 19, no. 1 (October 1972), pp.65–74; Heinz O. Guenther, "Gnosticism in Corinth?" in *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity. Essays in Honour of John C. Hurd*, edited by B. H. McLean (JSNTSup 86; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 44–81.

3 See King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Belknap Press, 2005); Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (Columbia University Press, 2008); Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Harvard University Press, 2010). Contra, Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth, An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971).

4 *Gnōsis* is the central theme in Paul's arguments in 1 Cor 8:1, 7, 10, 11. The noun form appears nine times in 1 Corinthians.

5 Jay E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18," 78-82; also see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, third edition (Boston: Beacon, 2001), pp. 266-273.

between the Gnostic texts and Corinthian slogans, both of which contain elements that advocate the moral irrelevance of the body.[1] For example, the writings of the Valentinian Gnostics, Basilides, and Nicolaitans, as well as several Nag Hammadi texts, display a similar moral indifference to bodily behavior. In conclusion, the Corinthians' perception of the body is similar to the dualist view of body and soul found in Stoicism and Proto-Gnosticism. They regard human body as weak, perishable, morally irrelevant, and indifferent to one's virtue in spirit.

The Corinthians' view of human body also significantly shaped their theological view of sin. The dualistic perception of spirit and body, coupled with the disembodied understanding of virtue and vice, lead to a disembodied understanding of sin: "Every sin that a person commits is outside (ἐκτὸς, meaning 'without, on the outside') the body" (1 Cor 6:18). This suggests that sin only takes place in the spiritual dimension and that physical actions do not incur sin. Consequently, the body is not an instrument for sin. Given that the human body is morally irrelevant in one's actions, "sin was an internal matter of motives and intentions and not an external matter related to the body."[2] Therefore, as the body is deemed to have no moral responsibility, the Corinthians are at liberty to act at their discretion with their body, including engaging in sexual immorality (1 Cor 6).

In alignment with this anthropological perspective on the body, the Corinthian concept of freedom is similarly disembodied. Despite the absence of the terms "free" (ἐλεύθερος) and "freedom" (ἐλευθερία) in 1 Cor 6:12-20, the concept of freedom is an underlying point of contention between Paul and the Corinthians.[3] Here, I focus on the Corinthian concept of freedom from the lens of

1 Jay E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18," pp. 78-80.

2 Jay E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18," p. 95. Also see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *First Corinthians* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1980), p. 51.

3 Larry W. Hurtado argues that the concept of freedom should be examined through a "discourse concept of freedom in the NT", and "a discourse concept" not only comprises the vocabulary that shares the same root ("lexemes") but also the words that express the same conceptual category. Thus, "a concept of freedom may

body and its ethical implications presented in this pericope. As previously stated, the Corinthians view the spirit as superior to the body. This results in their view of ultimate freedom as releasing one's true self, the divine pneuma, from the constraints of the inferior and material substance.[1] Once one is detached from the fleshliness of human body, his pneuma-self is finally set free. This understanding of freedom leads to two dangerous ways of ethical expressions: The first is those who eschew the material world and its potential to corrupt one's pneuma-self through extreme asceticism. The second is those who recognize the immunity of one's pneumatic self regardless of one's bodily actions, expressing their freedom through unbridled libertinism.[2] Therefore, asceticism and libertinism represent two ethical expressions of this disembodied freedom, despite the external differences in their actions. Both ethical expressions are found in the Corinthian church, as illustrated in the cases of the sexual libertines in chapters 5-6 and ascetic practices in chapter 7.

In conclusion, the Corinthians' views present a dualist view of body and soul that manifests similar traits of Stoicism and Proto-Gnosticism. They perceived the body as weak and perishable, and since the body is regarded as inferior to the spirit (pneuma) and irrelevant to one's redemption, body is also deemed morally irrelevant and indifferent to one's spirit. Virtue and sin are merely spiritual categories, detached from the physical realm. Given that bodily behaviors have no impact on one's spirit, their bodily actions are a matter of free choice with no moral accountability. This has shaped their understanding of freedom, leading to the practices of asceticism and libertinism in the Corinthian church.[3] In light of these theological claims of the Corinthians, Paul refutes their arguments

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be reflected in sentences that do not even use the words 'freedom' or 'free'." See Larry W. Hurtado, "Freed by Love and for Love: Freedom in the New Testament," in *Quests for Freedom: Biblical, Historical, Contemporary*, second edition, ed. by Michael Welker (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2019), p. 213.

1 Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth,* p. 218.

2 Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth,* p. 219.

3 Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth,* p. 231.

concerning the body and further elaborates his theology of body and freedom in 1 Cor 6:12-20.

Body and Freedom in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

The immediate context of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 is 6:1-11, in which the identity of the church as a community is threatened by lawsuits between believers. While the rich Christians might hire legal advocates to solve their disputes within the Corinthian community, Paul urges them, rather, to "suffer wrong" and "be defrauded" for the sake of unity within the body of Christ (6:7-8).[1] The same sentiment is evident when Paul addresses the issue of sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. In order to understand Paul's approach in 1 Cor 6:12-20, it is first necessary to examine the structure of this passage and the rhetorical style he employs in the text. Scholars have identified Paul's use of Corinthian slogans in the pericope and his use of diatribe, a rhetorical form that is commonly found in Greco-Roman literature, in response to the Corinthian slogans.[2] The Greco-Roman diatribe is characterized by five elements: "vivid dialogue mode, imaginary second-person interlocutors, objections/false conclusions, characteristic rejection phrases (especially the phrase μη γένοιτο), and vocative apostrophes such as ὦ ἄνθρωπε."[3] Burk argues that there are at least four elements discernable in 1 Cor 6:12-20: the phrase μη γένοιτο ("May it never be!") in v. 15,

1 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.419.

2 Denny Burk, "Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of the Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 18, no. 1 (2008), pp.99–121. For the use of diatribe in Pauline letters, see Duane F. Watson, "Diatribe," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993), p.214; Watson lists 1 Cor 6:12-20, 15:29-41, Gal 3:1-9, and pp.19-22 as texts that exhibit diatribal elements. K. K. Yeo, *Shengjing Xiucixue: Xiluo Wenhuayu Xinyue Quanshi* 圣经修辞学：希罗文化与新约诠释 *Biblical Rhetoric: Greco-Roman Cultures and New Testament Hermeneutics* (Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2007), pp.343-344.

3 Denny Burk, "Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of the Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," p.103. Also see Changwon Song, *Reading Romans as Diatribe*, ed. Hemchand Gossai (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), pp.260-261.

the objection/false conclusion in v. 15, three occurrences of οὐκ οἴδατε ("do you not know…") in vv. 15, 16, 19, which indicate rhetorical questions of Paul rejecting the interlocutors, and ten references to the addressees as the second-person plural (vv. 15-16, 18-20).[1] If the presence of diatribe form is recognized in 1 Cor 6:12-20, the text should be read dialogically rather than monologically. In other words, despite the texts being written from Paul's perspective, it can be read as a conversation between two sides arguing back and forth.[2] A reconstruction of the dialogues in 1 Cor 6:12-20 can be framed in the following table:[3]

Corinthian Slogans/Views	Paul's Diatribe
12 "All things are lawful for me." "All things are lawful for me,"	*but* not all things are beneficial. *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. 15a Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?
15b Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?	15b *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

1 Denny Burk, "Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of the Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," pp.104-105.

2 Denny Burk, "Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of the Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," pp.104-105.

3 This chart is adapted from Denny Burk, "Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of the Diatribe in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," 111. FIGURE 3. The Diatribe Form in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. The italics are added by my own for the sake of emphasis.

	spirit with him. 18a Shun fornication!
18b "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.

This reconstruction elucidates the arguments of both conversing parties: vv. 12, 13, and 18b are the Corinthian slogans quoted by Paul, while vv. 15b-18a are Paul's objections to them, using the form of diatribe and rhetorical questions. Following each Corinthian slogan, Paul uses an adversative particle, ἀλλά (v. 12) and δέ (v. 13, 18), to imply his rejection. While scholars are divided on the issue of whether 6:18b is a Corinthian slogan, this paper takes the view that it is, as this interpretation best explains Paul's rhetoric.[1] If 6:18b is taken as Paul's own theological statement, then he is not focusing on sexual immorality within the body but rather claiming that sin only occurs outside the body. This would cause incoherence within his theology.[2]

In Paul's quotations of the Corinthian slogans as well as his diatribes and refutations, the locus of the contention is the differences in understanding of body

1 For the detailed evaluation of both sides' arguments, see Andrew David Naselli, "Is Every Sin Outside the Body Except Immoral Sex? Weighing Whether 1 Corinthians 6:18b Is Paul's Statement or a Corinthian Slogan." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 4 (2017), pp.969–987. For a full summary of the history of this interpretation until the pivotal work of Jerome Murphy O'Connor, see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (July 1978): pp.391-396.

2 This interpretation not only contradicts 1 Cor 6:19-20, but also Paul's view in Romans 6:12-13: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies, so that you obey their desires. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness."

between Paul and the Corinthian church. Verse 12 pertains to the Corinthians' understanding of body as morally irrelevant, thereby justifying their actions. Verses 13 through 18a concentrate on the Corinthians' libertine lifestyle of engaging in fornication. Verses 18b-20 illustrate their perception that the physical body is irrelevant to sin. For exegetical purposes, the passages are divided into three exegetical units, i.e., verse 12, verses 13-17, and verses 18-20, for further elaboration.

V12: The Freedom of Corinthians and Paul's Rhetoric

Verse 12 begins with Paul's quotations of the Corinthian slogan, "All things are lawful for me (πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν)." The third-person singular present indicative verb ἔξεστι is related to the word ἐξουσία, meaning authority or right to do a thing.[1] Many traditional translations seem to indicate that "all things are sanctioned by the law" yet they in fact indicate "that which the law no longer prohibits, i.e., it is part of the Corinthian theology that Christian believers have been granted liberty from the law."[2] The noun ἐξουσία implies the right to act because those who own ἐξουσία are given the freedom to choose, and the verb ἐξουσιάζω in the active voice means "to control someone else's rights, power, or freedom of choice."[3] Thus, this slogan can be interpreted as "the liberty to do anything," highlighting the freedom of choice in Corinthian theology.[4]

In his responses to the Corinthian slogans, Paul provides a counter-perspective to the individual freedom endorsed by the slogans. Paul's argumentation is related to the rhetorical style he adopts. Margaret M. Mitchell identifies 1 Corinthians as deliberative rhetoric, an argumentation "which urges

1 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, "ἐξουσία," *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ninth edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 599.

2 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 461. For example, NRSV and KJV translate it as "all things are lawful", and NRSVUE and NASB translate it as "all things are permitted for me".

3 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* p. 461.

4 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* p. 461.

an audience, either public or private, to pursue a particular course of action in the future," a rhetorical style utilized pervasively in the epistles in antiquity.[1] As 1 Corinthians is epistolary, Paul combines deliberative rhetoric with epistolary elements.[2] This rhetoric can be identified in Paul's use of the verb συμφέρω ("to be helpful, to be beneficial") in v. 12, following his quotation of the Corinthians' slogan. The verb (and its corresponding noun form) appears five times throughout the letter and functions as an appeal to advantage on each occasion, and it is also a key term common in ethical and political discourse in antiquity.[3] The change from ἐξουσία (authority) to συμφέρειν (helpful/beneficial) also implies Paul's urge to change in the Corinthians' vantage point from individual-oriented to community-oriented. In addition, the identity in Christ also prompts this change in perspective, which means "to share Christ's concern for the well-being of the other, and to let go of his or her own freedoms in order to liberate the other."[4] For Paul, individual freedom is to be limited when in conflict with the well-being of the community.

In the same verse, Paul quotes the slogan for the second time and responds, "but I will not be dominated (ἐξουσιασθήσομαι, meaning "will not be mastered") by anything." Hughes and Jewett translate it as "I will not be made a slave by anything," suggesting the topics of both advantage and honor.[5] Thus, in v.12, Paul uses both the themes of advantage and honor to critique the Corinthians. By reiterating their own slogans and refuting them, Paul uses deliberative rhetoric in

1 Margaret Mary Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, Hermeneutische Untersuchungen Zur Theologie 28 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Paul Siebeck, 1991), p. 21.

2 Margaret Mary Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation,* p. 20.

3 Συμφέρειν and its noun form appear in 1 Cor 6:12; 7:35; 10:23; 10:33; 12:7. Margaret Mary Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation,* p.33.

4 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* p. 462.

5 Frank Witt Hughes and Robert Jewett, *The Corinthian Correspondence: Redaction, Rhetoric, and History* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), p. 125.

a highly polemic context with elements of judicial rhetoric as well. He attempts to change the Corinthians' perspective from an individualistic to a community-oriented one, and as he redefines what it means to be helpful, his appeal to advantage challenges them to think about whom their behaviors are helpful/beneficial.[1]

VV13-17: Violating the Body as the Members of Christ

In vv. 13-17, there are two objections that Paul counters, the Corinthian slogan in v. 13 and Paul's imagery interlocutor in v. 15b. The Corinthian slogan in vv. 13-14 writes, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other."[2] For the Corinthians, since both the food and the stomach will perish and there is no resurrection of the body (1 Cor 15:12), what they eat does not affect their spirit or their redemption. Yet Paul, who argues that the body is for the Lord, gives much weight to the body's role as a moral agent. The body is not free to be discarded in the resurrection; our bodily existence has a higher purpose in the eschaton (1 Cor 6:14). In vv. 13-14, two striking structural parallels and contrasts can be detected: "Food is for…and stomach for…" and "the body is not for… but for…"; the second is that God will "destroy" in contrast with God will "raise". Paul's understanding of the resurrection challenges the Corinthians with two assumptions about the body. First, there is no simple way to dissect one's personhood as body plus spirit, since they are inseparable for human existence. Second, the resurrection is not a spiritual event; it is both physical and spiritual, an issue Paul further refutes in 1 Corinthians 15:12.

In vv. 13-14 Paul considers not only the individual physical body, but also the community of Christ as a whole body. Human body is to be viewed in terms of

1 Margaret Mary Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, p.35; p. 119.

2 Following Robert H. Gundry's opinion, I believe that the sentence "and God will destroy both one and the other" is a part of the Corinthian slogan, though not every English translation agrees with this opinion. See Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology*, p. 58.

relations, allowing individuals to interact with its surrounding environment and to be interacted with it. This feature of Pauline understanding of body can also be seen in his interchangeable uses of singular and plural forms of the words σῶμα and σώματι and the second-person pronoun. In v. 13 the two occurrences of the term "body" are in singular form (σῶμα, σώματι), and in v. 14 Paul says that it is "us" (ἡμᾶς) whom the Lord will raise. The interchangeability of "body" (singular) and "you" (plural) implies that Paul is concerned not only with individual bodies, but also with the one social and corporate body composed of individual bodies in Christ (1 Cor 15). As Robert Jewett has written, "The word σῶμα defines ἡμᾶς as a corporal entity whose nature is to be a member of another and so to cling to another in full corporal union."[1]

Paul proceeds to illustrate his understanding of the body as he criticizes the issue of sexual union with prostitutes in vv. 15-17. He argues that since our individual bodies constitute the members of Christ (which he further illustrates in 1 Cor 12), they cannot be the members of Christ, yet at the same time remain the members of a prostitute. The term "members of Christ" anticipates the "body of Christ" in 1 Cor 12:12, and Paul moves from the individual level to the communal level by referring to the ecclesial body of the Church as a whole.[2] The term "members of Christ" also establishes the boundary of the body of Christ and identifies the insiders of the community, of which the prostitute is not one.[3]

Paul further interprets the sexual union with a prostitute as "being joined to a prostitute" and "becoming one body with her." The verb κολλάω means "to glue together", and when used metaphorically, it means "to unite with" and "to associate with." It is also used in v. 17 to describe the union with Christ. This parallel between the union with a prostitute in v.16 and the union with the Lord in v. 17 is clear, and Paul is urging the Corinthians to develop the proper form of

1 Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, pp. 259–260.

2 Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology*, p. 61.

3 Margaret Mary Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, p. 120.

union with Christ. Union with a prostitute is in direct conflict with the union with the Lord, for Paul considers it a sin against God. Brian Rosner argues that the πορνεία (sexual immorality) to which Paul refers is not secular prostitution but sacred prostitution, most likely temple prostitution ("prostitution at cultic events of a festive nature").[1] Corinth, a harbor city that relied on commerce and trade, was influenced by the worship of Greco-Roman pagan gods. The city was renowned for its worship of Aphrodite who was revered as the goddess of sailors, sacred prostitution, and the protectress of the city.[2] Thus, the nature of temple prostitution involves more than sexual immorality; it also involves idolatry. In the Old Testament and Jewish moral teachings, sacred prostitution is condemned as apostasy from God, and it becomes a metaphor for Israel's unfaithfulness to God and their worship of other gods.[3] In vv. 15-17, Paul uses similar language to remind them that one cannot be a member of Christ and a member of the union with a prostitute at the same time, as one cannot worship God and other pagan gods at the same time, which is idolatry. Furthermore, temple prostitution is more than a violation of the physical body between the fornicators; it destroys the holistic and relational connection with God and with the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church. In verse 16, Paul cites Genesis 2:24 and contrasts the marriage union of Adam and Eve with the union with a prostitute. Just as the marriage union of husband and wife symbolizes the union between Christ and the church, the illicit and immoral union with the temple prostitute symbolizes the union with pagan gods, which is idolatry in Paul's eyes.

To briefly conclude, unlike the Corinthians who believe that body and spirit are separate and the body is irrelevant to one's morality, Paul views one's physical body and spirit holistically, and the sin of sexual immorality is thus an offense against the whole body, including both the spiritual and the physical dimensions.

1 Brian Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," *Novum Testamentum* 40, no. 4 (1998), p. 348.

2 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 738.

3 Brian Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," pp. 344–345.

This sin also destroys the communal bond with Christ. As Mitchell writes, for Paul, "Sex with prostitutes, the sin of πορνεία, is to be avoided on the basis of the principle of communal identity and communal ethical responsibility."[1]

VV18-20: Your Body is Not Your Own

Following his abomination of temple prostitution, Paul cites another crucial Corinthian slogan regarding the body in vv. 18-20: "Every sin that a person commits is outside the body." Paul argues that the sin of sexual immorality is an offense against one's own body, and that their body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The slogan in v.18 conveys two aspects of the Corinthian theology of body: first, the Corinthians consider the body morally irrelevant, and sin occurs outside the body. But for Paul, invoking the image of the temple implies the connection between temple prostitution and idolatry: "Don't go to the temple (to use prostitutes) and worship pagan gods, you are the temple of God!"[2] The sin of sexual immorality causes spiritual, relational, and physical damage to those who engage in it.

Second, the Corinthians take an individualistic view of sin, that one's sin is only concerned with the individual who commits it. To further refute this misconception of sin and body, Paul uses both singular and plural noun forms to refer to the human body: in v. 18, Paul speaks of sin against "one's own body" (τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα, singular); in v. 19, the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit is "the body of all of you" (τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν) so that "you all are not of yourselves" (οὐκ ἐστὲ ἑαυτῶν). Paul's pairing of a singular noun (τὸ σῶμα) with a plural pronoun (ὑμῶν) in v. 19 indicates that he understands the body in terms of the relationship between individuals and the community: those who sin against their own body also sin against the corporate body of Christ, the Church.[3] Comparing the usage

1 Margaret Mary Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, p. 120.

2 Brian Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20," pp. 345–346.

3 Robert H. Gundry, *Sōma in Biblical Theology*, p. 74.

of the term σῶμα in Romans 8:23, Nijay K. Gupta points out that in 1 Corinthians, Paul's preference for using "the singular of σώμα could be theological, drawing attention to the corporate while speaking particularly about each individual."[1] Paul uses the plural "you (all)" as the subject of God's temple in 1 Cor 3:16, which corresponds to Romans 12:1, where Paul exhorts his readers to present their "bodies" (plural) to God as a living "sacrifice" (singular) and to be transformed by the renewal of their "mind" (singular). By adopting both the singular and plural forms of "you" and "body", Paul is concerned with both the individual bodies of the Corinthians and the corporate body of the Church as the Body of Christ. Each individual body is incorporated into one corporate Body of Christ, the indwelling of God's Spirit.

By saying, "You all are not of yourselves," Paul is rhetorically challenging them to change their vantage point of advantage.[2] Their bodies do not belong to themselves because they were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23) through the Lord's redemption, and now they belong to the Lord, and thus to the Lord's body, the Church. Thus, Paul uses his deliberative arguments to challenge the Corinthians to make decisions for the advantage of the church community as members of Christ, rather than for their own benefit and advantage. The pericope concludes with Paul's exhortation to "glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:20). As members of the body of Christ, everyone is responsible for their bodily behaviors.

Paul's Reframing of Freedom Through the Lens of Body

Two concepts related to body, i.e., flesh (σάρξ) and body (σῶμα), are crucial in the Pauline epistles and Paul's theology.[3] Before we look into the usage of σῶμα

1 Nijay K Gupta, "Which 'body' Is a Temple (1 Corinthians 6:19)? Paul beyond the Individual/Communal Divide," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (July 2010), p. 523.

2 Margaret Mary Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, p. 36.

3 For a general comparison of the use of σάρξ and σῶμα, and their usage in the New Testament, see XIE Wenyu, "Jieding Shengming Gainian: Xinyuedui xila zhexue dechongji" 界定生命概念：新约对希腊哲学的冲击 Defining the Concept of Life: the Challenges of the New Testament to the Greek Philosophy, in *Youtai*

in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, I offer a brief summary of the similarities and the differences between these two terms in Pauline letters.

In the Pauline epistles, the basic meaning of σάρξ is "the flesh-substance common to men and beasts."[1] Paul confines σάρξ to the meaning of human flesh, except for 1 Cor 15:39, where all creation is included in the term. At times, the term σάρξ is often synonymous with the term σῶμα to refer to human existence.[2] The term also describes the earthly realm as opposed to the spirit realm, not considered sinful by God but as limited and provisional.[3] The third usage of σάρξ describes how human physicality becomes an object of human trust and turns into a cosmic category.[4] In this case, it becomes a cosmic category that lures humans into false promises of their own and opposes the new aeon brought by God.[5] Consequently, humans are in a constant struggle between "the leading of the spirit" and "the luring of the flesh."[6] For example, the circumcised σάρξ in the polemics in Galatians and Romans,[7] the life κατὰ σάρκα ("in flesh") in sharp contrast to the life κατὰ πνεῦμα ("according to the spirit") that leads to eternal life,[8] the phrase κατὰ σάρκα ("according to the flesh") refers to either the blood relationship or family ties or the works of circumcision as a means of salvation.[9] For its

yanjiu 犹太研究 *Jewish Research,* volume 14 (Shandong: Shandong University Press, 2016), pp. 83-97.

1 John Arthur Thomas Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (SCM, 1952), p. 17.

2 For example, 1 Cor 6:16; 10:18; 15:39, 50; 2 Cor 4:11; 7:1, 12:7. See Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, 119. Also see Eduard Schweizer, "σῶμα, σωματικός, σύσσωμος," *TDNT*, 7: 125-35.

3 For example, Rom 9:8; 11:14; 1 Cor 10:18; 2 Cor 7:5.

4 Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, pp. 114-115.

5 Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, pp. 115-116.

6 Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, pp. 115-116.

7 Rom 2:28; 3:20; 8:3-5; Gal 2:16; 3:3; 5:13, 17, 19, 6:12; 13.

8 Two derivative words σαρκικός and σάρκινος (both meaning fleshly, worldly), are used to indicate the earthly realm as opposed to the godly realm. σαρκικός in Rom 15:27; 1 Cor 9:11; 2 Cor 1:12; 2 Cor 10:4; σάρκινος in Rom 7:14; 1 Cor 3:1; 2 Cor 3:3.

9 Rom 1:3; 4:1; 8:4, 5, 12, 13; 9:3, 5; 1 Cor 1:26; 2 Cor 1:17; 5:16; 7:1; 10:2-4; 11:18; Gal 3:3; 4:23, 29; Phlm 1:16

connection to the old aeon and demonic power, σάρξ as the physical flesh appears to be the source of corruption and sin.[1]

The term σῶμα displays both similar and different connotations when compared with Pauline uses of σάρξ. The term primarily refers to the human physical body, including the visible, concrete human body of a person, and the existence of individual human beings.[2] Furthermore, σῶμα is understood as the basis of relationship and communication with other person(s) or God.[3] This is particularly prominent in the Corinthian correspondence, where Paul addresses a range of issues related to the body. The term σῶμα Χριστοῦ in communal settings refers to the community as the body of Christ, with individual members as the members of the whole body in Christ.[4] The term σῶμα also describes "the somatic ground of existence" in the old and new aeons marked by Christ's event.[5] In Romans, σῶμα is used along with σάρξ, and constitutes phrases such as "body of sin," "dead body," "mortal body," and "body of death," which depict life in the old aeon of death.[6] In contrast to the term σάρξ which is often connected to sin and death in Paul's writings, σῶμα for Paul also describes the body in the contexts of the new aeon of salvation, such as the bodily resurrection, redemption, and the act of worshiping God through offering one's body as living sacrifice.[7] Lastly, σῶμα refers to the body of Christ, which is given to us, particularly in the eucharistic texts of 1 Corinthians 11:24-27.

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1 Gal 4:13-14; 5:13, 16-19, 24; 6:8; Rom 6:19; 7:5,18, 25; 8:3-9; 13:14; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:28; 2 Cor 7:5. Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, p. 154. Also see Troy W. Martin, "Whose Flesh? What Temptation? (Galatians 4.13-14)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21, no. 74 (1999): pp. 81–82.

2 1 Cor 5:3; 6:15, 7:4; 9:27; 13:3; 2 Cor 4:10; 5:6, 8, 10; 10:10; 12:2-3; Gal 6:17; Phil 1:20; 1 Thess 5:23.

3 Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, p.263.

4 Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 6:15; 10:16-17; 11:24-27, 29; 12:12-27.

5 Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, p. 457.

6 Rom 6:6, 12; 7:24; 8:10-11, 13. Jewett suggests that this is Paul's appropriation of the Gnostic view of the body being the source of death for man, which is untypical for Pauline theology. Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, p. 294.

7 Rom 8: 11, 23; 12:1; 1 Cor 15: 35-40; 44; Phil 3:21. Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, p. 457.

From the comparison and contrast between the usages of two terms, it is clear that Paul considers σῶμα to be redeemable on the individual level and relational on the communal level. In the specific case of 1 Cor 6:12-20, Paul's refutation reflects two major tensions regarding the Corinthians' views on body. The first is the dualistic view of body and spirit and the disembodied moral view, and the second is the division between individual bodies and the communal body of Christ. In this pericope, Paul's theology of body is constructed through his arguments surrounding the term σῶμα, which can be understood to have multiple meanings as follows:

(1) σῶμα as the individual human body, "as the basis of unity and interdependence between persons," which can be seen in the cases of idolatry, marriage, and sexual immorality mentioned in vv. 13, 16;[1]

(2) σῶμα as the body of Christ, the corporate ἐκκλησία in which the identity of each member is in the membership of the community, exemplified in v. 15;

(3) σῶμα as a holistic understanding of human being, the full existence of physical and spiritual, the embodied indwelling of God's spirit, which can be affected by sinful actions and is held morally responsible, as shown in Paul's arguments in vv. 18, 19, 20.

These three theological perspectives on the body challenge the misconceptions held by the Corinthian church regarding body and freedom. For Paul, as the spiritual and physical dimensions are integral to one's existence, human body is the moral agent for one's virtue and sin. In other words, one's bodily actions (such as eating and sexual intercourse) and relationships with others (such as sexual immorality) are held morally responsible. Sin, therefore, is truly embodied. For individuals in the Corinthian church, bodily actions should be held accountable for one's virtue and sin.

Another crucial aspect of Pauline theology of body in this pericope is the

1 Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms*, p. 456.

dynamic between individual bodies and the communal body of Christ, i.e., the Church. As a member of the body of Christ, each individual and their bodily actions matter to the communal body. Thus, Paul exhorts them to change their vantage point from an individualistic perspective to communal, taking into account the advantages and benefits for the body of Christ as a whole, because each individual body and its actions matter to the communal body of Christ. He redefines the relationship between the individual σῶμα and the communal σῶμα, advocating for a different understanding of freedom.

The concept of freedom is pervasive throughout the Pauline epistles and in Pauline theology.[1] Considering its limited scope, this paper does not provide a comprehensive analysis of Pauline theology on freedom. But in the pericope of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, despite the absence of ἐλεύθερ- words, freedom is one of the underlying theological themes, and the different understandings of it have caused the issue of sexual immorality in the passage. Paul's reiteration of the Corinthian slogans of "all things are lawful for me" and "every sin a person commits is outside the body" demonstrates that the Corinthians' disembodied view of morality has granted them the freedom to act as they will with their bodies.[2] This has led to an individualistic understanding of freedom. If the Corinthians' understanding of freedom is to be defined as the freedom *from* certain moral responsibilities resulting from individual bodily behaviors, then Paul's view of freedom emphasizes the freedom *for* others in the body of Christ. This can be further illustrated in Chris Tilling's summary of the three major characteristics of freedom in Paul's theology:

First, Paul speaks of freedom in a way that aligns it with the empowerment

1 For a comprehensive presentation on the exegesis and theology of freedom in Paul's letters, see Wayne Coppins, *The Interpretation of Freedom in the Letters of Paul with Special Reference to the "German" Tradition*, 1. Aufl., Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament. 2. Reihe, 261 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); For a general overview of the concept of freedom in the New Testament, see Larry W. Hurtado, "Freed by Love and for Love: Freedom in the New Testament," pp. 209-228.

2 Also see 1 Cor 10:23. For Paul's refutation, see 1 Cor 8:9.

of others and promoting the consideration of others' interests through participating in Christ.[1] Freedom is presented as a form of love shaped by the "abundance of divine generosity and love for the other," as opposed to the notion of freedom as a "mutually exclusive space."[2] In other words, the Pauline theology of freedom emphasizes the "relational nature of freedom".[3] This aspect of freedom is particularly evident in Paul's exhortation for the Corinthians to consider the impacts of each individual's bodily behavior on the communal body of Christ.

Second, for Paul, freedom is not merely about having more choices, as if the two were directly correlated with more choices equating to more freedom.[4] Paul identifies certain behaviors and choices as leading to enslavement rather than freedom.

Third, Paul acknowledges that just as our interconnectedness as human beings shapes our experience of freedom, so does our physical embodiment, which is the concrete manifestation of our interconnectedness.[5] This aspect of freedom is closely connected to Paul's theology of body. In Romans 8:23, Paul underscores the freedom for the enslaved in the bondage of sin in terms of the "redemption of our bodies", and in 1 Corinthians 6, Christian believers "belong to the single ('one') Christ-corporeity as his 'members' (τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 6:15; and ὁ κολλώμενος τῷ κυρίῳ ἓν πνεῦμά ἐστιν, 6:17)."[6] In verse 14, Paul asserts that God will raise us by his power "as the single in-Christ corporeity, for whom 'bodily' existence matters."[7] In light of the event of Christ's resurrection, the

1 Phil. 2:3-11. Chris Tilling, "Freedom in Paul and Modernity," in *Theology, Music, and Modernity: Struggles for Freedom,* ed. Jeremy Begbie et al (Oxford: University Press, 2021), p. 80.

2 Chris Tilling, "Freedom in Paul and Modernity," p. 80.

3 Chris Tilling, "Freedom in Paul and Modernity," p. 80.

4 Chris Tilling, "Freedom in Paul and Modernity," p. 80.

5 Chris Tilling, "Freedom in Paul and Modernity," p. 80.

6 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* p. 464.

7 Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians,* p. 464.

Pauline understanding of freedom is expressed through the physicality of human beings and the interconnectedness of the body of Christ. This freedom is exercised by Christ's followers in communal relationships, in the actions of loving others and mutual support. As Tilling rightly summarizes, "It is a freedom that does not compete with others for space, but seeks, rather, to build up the other through loving actions."[1]

Theological Implications in Chinese Cultural Contexts

Paul's reframing of freedom through the lens of the body in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 has radical implications. It challenges the Corinthians' dualist view of the body and its disembodied moral implication, as well as the division between individual bodies and the communal body of Christ. He emphasizes the integration of the physical and spiritual dimensions of human beings and the embodied nature of one's sinful actions. For Paul, no sin is committed outside one's body. Furthermore, he redefines the vantage point from which benefits are derived, shifting the focus from the individual to the community by constructing the identity of the Corinthian Christians in Christocentric terms. The individual body is incorporated into the social body of Christ, the Church, in which each individual is closely connected with others in Christ. This leads to Paul's theological view that freedom is not primarily individualistic but rather communal, emphasizing the relationships and interconnectedness of human physicality.

While Paul's theology is universally applied, its reception is culturally specific. In the modern Western contexts where freedom is understood as a personal space that is inviolable and closely related to concepts like "choice" and "individuality," Paul's emphasis on the communal body of Christ seems counterintuitive.[2] Here,

1 Chris Tilling, "Freedom in Paul and Modernity," p. 81.

2 Chris Tilling, "Freedom in Paul and Modernity," p. 78.

I suggest that the Confucius concept of freedom offers a powerful hermeneutical bridge for understanding Paul in Chinese cultural contexts.

Freedom in the Confucian ethic is closely connected to the concept of choosing goodness and benevolence (*ren*, 仁) in communal contexts. In the *Analects*, Confucius says, "When walking with two other people, I will always find a teacher among them. I focus on those who are good and seek to emulate them, and focus on those who are bad in order to be reminded of what needs to be changed in myself" (*Analects* 7:22).[1] "I listen widely, and then pick out that which is excellent in order to follow it" (*Analects* 7:28). The *Zhongyong* (《礼记中庸》) states that "He who attains to sincerity is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast."[2] These sayings indicate that Confucian freedom emphasizes the outcome of choice (goodness) rather than the act of choosing per se.[3] The ultimate ideal of freedom is having the ability to choose the good (*ze shan*, 择善) in alignment with the pursuit of benevolence (*ren*, 仁) as the ultimate ideal of human virtue.

Furthermore, in the pursuit of the highest goodness and *ren*, the Confucian thinkers situate humans in social relationships rather than detaching oneself from the world. Confucius says, "Virtue is never solitary; it always has neighbors" (*Analects* 4:25); "Desiring to take his stand, one who is Good helps others to take their stand; wanting to realize himself, he helps others to realize themselves" (*Analects* 6:30); when asked about what is goodness, Confucius replies, "Care for others" (*Analects* 12:22). One's cultivation of virtue and practices of goodness must be achieved and transformed in relationships with others, and when one chooses what is good for others, he/she is practicing the ultimate freedom. In

1 I adopt Edward Slingerland's English translation here. See Confucius, *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Translated by Edward Slingerland. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2013.

2 诚之者，择善而固执之者也。

3 Chenyang Li, "The Confucian Conception of Freedom," *Philosophy East & West* (Honolulu) 64, no. 4 (2014), p. 909.

other words, Confucian understanding of freedom is never an individualist choice in the modern sense; it must involve one's practice of personal freedom in light of what is good and beneficial to others in the communal settings. This view of freedom highlights one's obligations and responsibilities to others in human relationships.

Both Pauline and Confucian ethics emphasize the obligations and consequences of one's actions toward others within all kinds of communities. In this sense, the similarities between Confucian thoughts and the Pauline concept of freedom help us understand Paul's theological visions in terms of his views on individual bodies in light of the communal body of Christ. In comparing the similarities and differences of Paul and Confucius on the concept of freedom, Yeo rightly summarizes,

> Unlike our modern thinking of the autonomous self (independent of others and free of responsibility), the communitarian teachings of Confucius and Paul do not accept the freedom of individuals to be independent as a good moral choice…In Confucian teaching, however there is a strong sense of moral choice, that is, there is a virtuous way to relate to other people, whether parents or strangers. Likewise, for Paul there is a freedom inherent in being human in the presence of the other. While Confucius sees the rationale for the moral obligation toward others as an ethical one, Paul sees the reason for relating virtuously to others as a Christological one, that is, it is rooted in an act of God.[1]

This Pauline-Confucian dialogue, therefore, offers a contextual theological reflection on the discourse of freedom in Chinese Christian contexts. It directly challenges the common misconception of freedom as Western individualism, which often misinterprets Christian freedom as the very error Paul confronted in Corinth: a private, disembodied, and individualist choice. Such dialogue also allows the Chinese Christians to affirm the relational values of their own cultural heritage while simultaneously re-centering them on a Christological foundation.

1 Khiok-Khng Yeo, *Musing with Confucius and Paul: Toward a Chinese Christian Theology* (James Clarke, 2008), p. 349.

In this way, Paul's reframing of freedom through the lens of body in 1 Cor 6:12-20 provides us with a more balanced view. It is not a freedom from social and moral responsibilities that leads to sin (the Corinthians' error), nor is it a freedom defined only by human ethics (the Confucian limit); rather, it is a freedom *for* others to do what is beneficial within the redeemed and interconnected Body of Christ.

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