



AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
TEACHER – Lesson 10

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20, Reported Problems

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1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Sex: Flee immorality

- 6:12-14 General principle: Lawful or helpful
- 6:15-18 Specifically: Flee immorality
- 6:19-20 Bought at a price

The problems of sexual immorality in the Corinthian church present an odd and contrasting mixture of cases. The church seems to have been more tolerant of immorality in the church than in the world. They allowed a case of incest but wouldn't eat with sexually immoral non-Christians. Some were going to prostitutes, while others were apparently advocating sexual abstinence even for married folks. It may be that some folks were living on both sides of these fences, but we should also assume that some members were erring in one direction while others were having problems in exactly the opposite direction.

Paul begins with a form of dialogue in which he refutes arguments that may have been advanced by the Corinthian Christians (vv. 12-14). Some may have claimed that what a person did with his body was of no importance since salvation was about a person's spirit. He then deals directly with the sin of sexual immorality, and, in particular, the use of prostitutes (vv. 15-18). He summarizes his objections using two metaphors (temple and slaves) to affirm that Christians must live as people whose bodies belong to God (vv. 19-20).

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Sex: Flee immorality

Some commentators suggest that Paul is quoting three arguments touted by the Corinthians, and then refuting these claims:

- a. "All things are lawful for me" (v. 12, cf. 10:23)
- b. "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods" (v. 13).
- c. "Every sin that a man does is outside the body" (v. 18b).

In support of the idea that these are not ideas that Paul accepts, but Corinthian claims that he refutes, is the fact that in each case the statement is followed immediately by "but," and the reason why Paul rejects such ideas.

Whether Paul disagrees with these ideas or agrees with the general principles, though offering important qualifiers, is difficult to determine with certainty. If the origin of these statements remains unclear, Paul's main points leave no doubt about the conduct he expects of Christians.

1. What does Paul say in chapters 5 & 6 that tell us clearly that he does not accept as absolute truth the statement, "All things are lawful for me"?

He identifies several behaviors that are clearly prohibited. 1 Cor. 5:9-10 gives a sample list of such behaviors. Incest and legal action among brethren are unacceptable, as is going to prostitutes.

Another idea is that all sins are but a distortion of something good. Sex is a great example. Sex is lawful, but when misused, it is not helpful.

2. If as a general principle all things are lawful or permissible, how could one become enslaved by that which is lawful?

Sometimes we become the slaves of our own freedom. We feel obliged to exercise our "rights" even if doing so is destructive to others or even to ourselves. This shows a "because I can, I will" mentality. E.g., college students who feel compelled to exercise their freedom from parental oversight to the point of harming themselves with immoral sex, alcohol, drugs, etc.

Later in the book of 1 Corinthians, some members were exercising their God-given gifts (tongue-speaking, etc.) in a way that was self-indulging, but was disruptive for the assemblies of the church.

3. What are the similarities and differences between the relationship of the stomach to food as compared to the relationship between the Christian's body and the Lord?

Both eating and sex are natural urges that cry out for indulgence, but which Christians must control. However, eating and sexual activity will end at death, but the body (and its relationship to God) will be resurrected. The eternal implications of any action must always be considered.

4. Paul mentions a person's body explicitly 8 times in this chapter (implied in other verses). Find them and identify the basic truths that he reveals about the integrity, ownership and use of the Christian's body?

Verse 13 (2x): It is not for sexual immorality and It belongs to God.

Verse 15: It is a member of Christ.

Verse 18 (2x): Sexual sin is within the body and defiles it.

Verse 19: It is the temple of God's Spirit.

Verse 20: It is bought by Christ to glorify God.

Note: In most manuscripts, "body" is the last word in verse 20. The rest of the verse ("and in your spirit, which are God's," NKJV) is omitted (see ESV, NIV).

The word "body" isn't used, but is implied by the pronoun "it" in the following:

Verse 14: God will raise us (i.e., our bodies)

Verse 17: It is joined to the Lord and is one spirit with him.

- 5. Why does Paul say it is wrong for a Christian to "become one" with a harlot? Why, since we are "joined to the Lord," is it wrong to be joined to a harlot, but still acceptable to be joined to one's spouse"? A failure to make this distinction might explain the problem that Paul will address at the beginning of chapter 7 concerning sexual abstinence in marriage.**

The marriage union is ordained by God, and he is a part of it (Matthew 19:4-6). The sexual union in marriage, since ordered by God, does not violate the purity of our relationship with God.

- 6. On this subject, what things does Paul expect the Corinthian Christians to already know, either by intuition or prior teaching, as indicated by the rhetorical question, "Do you not know?"**

Verse 15: Their bodies are members of Christ.

Verse 16: Sex with a harlot makes a man "one with her."

Verse 19: Our body is the temple of God's Spirit.

- 7. What does Paul mean by the statement that all sins except sexual sins are outside the body? Can you not think of any other sins that would seem to be "against the body"? Is Paul's statement that immorality is a sin "against his own body," a mere limitation on the general truth that sins are generally "outside the body," or is it a direct disagreement with this claim?**

This is possibly a general, proverbial type statement meaning: In general, sins are outside the body. Still, there is an aspect of the sexual union that is indeed unique to it. E.g., the special intimacy and becoming one with one's sex partner. No other sin violates the

sanctity and purity of the body of Christ in the same way as a member of that body becoming illicitly “one” with someone else (v.17).

The thought changes if we take the statement, “Every sin that a man does is outside the body,” as a claim made by the Corinthians, but not endorsed by Paul. In that case, his statement that, “he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body,” is a denial that all sins are “outside the body.”

8. According to his statement in verse 18, what would Paul likely say to the defense that being with a prostitute, “Didn’t mean anything. It was just sex”?

Whether with a prostitute, or any other non-spousal union, Paul would deny that sex can be no more than sex. Recognize it or not, the sexual union is like no other relationship.

9. Some Corinthian philosophies claimed that what the body did could be totally separate from a person’s soul, and therefore, unrelated to his relationship with God. How might teachings such as Paul’s in Romans 8:9-10 have been distorted to support that view and thereby appear to justify the immorality that Paul condemns?

A person could claim that Christians live “in the Spirit” and the “body is dead.” Therefore, they would claim, sexual activity (even immoral activity), being a physical act, would have no negative impact on one’s relationship with God.

Just because someone can use a verse out of context, and make it mean something the writer didn’t mean, doesn’t make the claim true. The Corinthians had already misinterpreted a statement by Paul (5:9-10). Maybe they also misinterpreted (conveniently) teachings reflected in Romans 8. See also 7:1ff for another misunderstanding.

10. The word “flee” is usually used in the physical sense of fleeing from one place to another (cp. Matthew 2:13; 26:56). Paul uses it four times in a spiritual sense (1 Cor 6:18; 10:14; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22). From what does Paul say we should flee and why might he have mentioned these things and not others? What connotation do you see in his choice of the word “flee” rather than something like “avoid” or “walk away from”?

1 Cor 6:18 – sexual immorality; 10:14 – idolatry; 1 Tim 6:11 – “these things,” (a list of sins); 2 Tim 2:22 – “youthful lusts”

These are particularly deceptive and attractive temptations that call for decisive action (cp. Matt 5:27-30; 1 Cor 10:12). Overconfidence has led many a Christian to “play with fire,”

thinking that he would never actually yield to the temptation, only to be seduced to the destruction of his soul.

“Flee” is a decisive and energetic avoidance to a dangerous situation. Consider the example of Joseph (Genesis 39:11-12). A calm, dignified response isn’t enough when the risks are so high.

11. Paul uses the analogies of the temple and a slave as he brings this section to a close. What fundamental idea is he presenting with these illustrations?

A Christian’s body does not belong to himself. The temple, as God’s dwelling, belongs to God. The phrase “bought at a price,” indicates that the Christian, like a slave, belongs to his master. At conversion, we turn over personal sovereignty of body and soul to God.

12. How is verse 20 much like verse 11 as a concluding statement of a major point? How do both verses tie Christian living to “the message of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)?

Both verses express the idea that we are to live a certain way for the simple reason that one who belongs to Christ lives that way. Our identity as God’s children directs our behavior, and our identity comes from what God has done to us and for us. Paul often draws attention to our identity as Christians rather than to commands we must follow.

We will all make mistakes and bad decisions, but our desire should always be to live in harmony with our submission to God rather than giving priority to self-will.