

Lessons from Corinth

“Why Can’t I Have Sex Outside of Marriage?”

Part 4:1 Cor. 6:12-20

August, 2013

12 “Everything is permissible for me,” but not everything is helpful. “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will not be brought under the control of anything. 13 “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food,” but God will do away with both of them. The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. 15 Don’t you know that your bodies are a part of Christ’s body? So should I take a part of Christ’s body and make it part of a prostitute? Absolutely not! 16 Don’t you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For Scripture says, *The two will become one flesh.*¹ 17 But anyone joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 18 Run from sexual immorality! “Every sin a person can commit is outside the body.” On the contrary, the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. 19 Don’t you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. Holman Christian Standard Bible.²

Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians was up and down. He was why they were believers and saw himself as their spiritual father (1 Cor. 4:14-15). Yet, they contended with him, resisted his instruction and insisted on their own way. The quotations shown in the text above are Corinthian sayings or slogans representing what they believed. In this passage, they are arguing for the “right” to go to prostitutes (6:15-16). As crazy as that sounds to us, they saw sexual behavior for the most part as amoral. Added to their pagan view of things was a “spiritual” twist: whatever you do in your physical body isn’t all that important one way or another, the “spiritual” things of life alone matter. “So, what’s wrong with a little sex outside of marriage?” they would argue, “Everything is OK, ‘permissible’ for the Christian. We have arrived, spiritually, and what is done with our bodies matters not.”³

What Paul presents here are strong and clear arguments underpinning why we as Christians hold to certain moral values concerning sexual behaviors. As always, Paul is concerned that they understand the “why,” the Truth principles, the theological reasons, behind the right and wrong of behavior.⁴

Paul begins by asserting the value of the physical body by pointing to the fact of the resurrection (6:14). If the body is of little importance, then why is it that God resurrected Jesus into a body? And why is Jesus’ resurrection but the “first fruits” guaranteeing *our* bodily resurrection as well (1 Cor. 15:20-25)?⁵ Having established the importance of the physical body in the present (because of our future existence), Paul “fleshes out” the implications relative to the body and immorality.

In this passage he argues that sexual immorality is an illegitimate use of the body and in effect devalues the body (6:13b). We belong to God, thus our body belongs to Him; we should glorify Him in them because He has purchased us at great price by giving His own life (6:13, 19b-20).

But why is immorality an illegitimate use of our bodies? To have sex with a prostitute is to become one “body” *with her*, thus denying the reality of our being *members* of Christ, our being one body *with Him*. We are *His body* and we must flee sexual immorality because to be joined with Christ and to be joined with a prostitute are mutually exclusive categories – one cannot be both (6:16). Sexual immorality violates the express truth that we and our bodies belong to Christ.

Paul's point in 6:17-19a takes us beyond the physical act of immorality itself. Because we are one *spirit* with God, there is an internal unity of life with Him that is deeper and more profound than the physical external. This is not to imply that the spiritual is of more value than the physical; to do so is to think dualistically like the Corinthians. Rather, it is to show that the external of the body is directed by the internal of who we are. Our body is not a piece of clothing that "wraps around" our spirit; rather, we are integrated wholes – spirit/soul and body.⁶

Our human spirit and His Spirit are co-joined, intertwined, and we live *internally* in the closest of communion with Him. Therefore, acts of immorality are not simply physical actions; but they violate us, defile us, at the core of who we are, *on the inside where He dwells*. I believe this has implications concerning the wrongness of pornography.

Pornography is primarily an *internal* sin. While it involves what one sees or reads, it is primarily an internal sin of imagination and conceptualization. Can you see how such actions violate the very core truth of the oneness of His Spirit/our spirit? Sexual sin then goes beyond the physical act itself to impact us at the core. How could it not but grieve the One who condescends to co-habit within us?

To summarize, we are one Spirit/spirit with Him (He dwells in us), we belong to Him, our bodies are part of His body, we (including our bodies) have been purchased at great price and our bodies are destined for resurrection. Our bodies then are *for* the Lord and *not* to use anyway we might choose or like, rather that He might be seen and honored through how we live in our bodies.

Implications

The 1960s brought about the so called "sexual revolution" in America. While some would argue that sex isn't all that revolutionary and that people had sex outside of marital boundaries right along, there is no question that this "revolution" radically changed the way Americans understood what was considered "right and wrong" about sexual behaviors. So much so, that fifty plus years later to attempt to qualify or restrict sexual behaviors is considered "Neanderthal."⁷ This attitude has influenced and shaped the church.⁸

Paul affirms the value of the body and I would suggest the "rightness" of sex properly expressed.⁹ God is no killjoy, rather He seeks to protect us so that we might fully avail of what He has given to for our enjoyment and fulfillment (He created sex after all.).¹⁰ Paul shows that unrestricted sexual expression is out of bounds *because of* the value of the body (thus sex) and because of our intimate unity with Christ.

This means that true spirituality and true sexual expression are both part of one package of God-given human design and fulfillment. To be fully "Spiritual" is not to be unrestrained in sexual expression *nor* is it to devalue or inhibit that expression within the bounds of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-5).¹¹

But let's be clear that for Paul there is **no** compromise with prevailing mores about sexual expression. When God has put a boundary around something, He does so for our safety *and* for our fulfillment. If we choose as Christians to violate that boundary, we are doing more than saying that we think God unwise or unjust in giving such a standard; we are expressing our pride, unbelief and arrogance in thinking that we know better than He. Such were the Corinthians. Whether we think we know better or not, we are called to an obedience of love (John 14:15) and must align ourselves with His Truth. If we do not, then what are we saying about our supposed love for Him?

One further point might be made. In a culture that has made sex one of its most important values (perhaps the most important), we have the opportunity to fully model what sexuality is to mean as given to us by a loving Creator. We are called to the fullness of life. In part, we must reassert the true and meaningful place sexual expression is to have in the context of married partners, committed fully to Jesus and one another. Yet this should be in the much larger context of a meaningful and productive *life*, one given to God's purposes for the world.

What I am saying is this. Sex was never meant to be the primary value of any culture (there are things more important); nor is to be understood on its own without the larger context of living.¹² I would suggest that the exaggerated and public place sex has been given in our culture in fact *devalues it* because now sex is no longer understood in the larger context of a purpose-filled life and a meaningful marriage relationship.

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NEXT: "I just don't *love* them anymore? It's time for a change!" 1 Cor. 7.

¹ Gen. 2:24.

² Bible Publishers (2010-09-16). The Holy Bible: HCSB Digital Text Edition (Kindle Locations 58506-58518). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

³ This kind of dualistic thinking was the root of many problems at Corinth, as we will see later.

⁴ God is not arbitrary in what He commands; He created us and intends good for us. He knows best what will truly fulfill us according to our created design.

⁵ The *resurrection of the body* is a Biblical idea. This is not the same as "resuscitation" whereby a dead person is brought back to life, e.g. Lazarus. In the resurrection, believers will receive a *new* body; Jesus' own resurrection is the proof and promise of this fact. Paul will address this more fully in 1 Cor. 15. The idea of a disembodied existence in heaven as the *final state* for the believer is not what the Bible teaches; although such a state is likely our situation in the interim as we await the final resurrection of the dead (2 Cor. 5:1-10).

⁶ Science has shown the profound integration of the physical, emotional, etc.

⁷ Very few things are considered "out of bounds" now. There are even those who advocate for adult/child sexuality. Once we abandon a foundation of moral absolutes, then we are left with only preferences. Needless to say, once God is eliminated from the equation, human sinfulness dictates what this new "new morality" look like.

⁸ Unfortunately, because the church has been shy (afraid) of addressing the issues of sex and healthy sexuality, the culture has not had a Biblical alternative. Typically the posture has been to ignore the subject or approach it with a list of "don'ts" rather than to search for Biblical understanding. After all, who made sex anyway?

⁹ While in this context Paul's quotation of Gen. 2:24 is not being used to affirm the value of sexuality in marriage, Gen. 2:24 certainly does just that when considered in its own context. He will say more on this in 1 Cor. 7.

¹⁰ The old argument sometimes waged against a Biblical view of legitimate sexual expression is that we somehow believe sex is only for "procreation" and shouldn't be enjoyed or mutually fulfilling. The Song of Solomon attests otherwise, at least! Whether anyone believed this in the past or not, I don't know. But I would guess that the typical Christian married couple throughout Church history knew better by their own experience. ☺

¹¹ Paul will say more in 1 Cor. 7.

¹² If that seems shocking to some, then it is only an indicator of how over inflated is our view of sexual expression. I probably could choose toothpaste or tires for my car with commercials sexualizing them.