

**Intro:**

We're in our series "Church: are you serious?," a series through the first century letter of 1 Corinthians which is part of the Bible. It's been an engaging series, I think, with many of us being profoundly affected by what God has had to say to us in the Bible. Throughout this series, we've looked at various subjects that deal with the interpersonal dynamics of spirituality a spiritual community of Jesus followers- I encourage you take a look at the archives to find out more. Today we focus on perhaps a more personal subject- our subject is sex and sexuality.

I assume that, in a crowd like this, we have different levels of comfort levels in talking about the subject. And I assume that we have different experiences and perspectives about it as well- some of see sex as a good and normal part of our lives, whether we're married or single; others may see it as sort of taboo and perhaps dirty. Some of us are pretty sexually active; others of us have practiced abstinence for much of our adult lives. I do want to make it clear that our perspective today comes from the angle of the Bible, and our passage is written to those who have given themselves to Jesus. In other words, the passage will have some distinct assumptions and prescriptions, based on a belief in Jesus and the morality he desires, namely that sex is designed to be enjoyed in the context of a marriage relationship. Nonetheless, I want to caution us on jumping to certain conclusions too quickly, thinking we already know about it or don't agree with the stance Jesus has. I believe we all have something to gain here if we can be open, and, especially for those of us who are still deciding if Jesus is someone you want to follow- I hope you can see some of the good logic of the Bible here, and that it will help you along in your journey.

Let's take a look at our text and see what's going on.

Read text: 1 Cor 6:12-20

The text essentially does two things: it makes some statements about what sex is, and then gives some prescriptions on why sex outside a certain context should not be done. I want to talk about these two things, but our first order of business is to make sure we touch on the subject of if this text has anything to do with us today.

**Does this Text Apply to me?**

What I mean is this: some may read this and think, well, this doesn't have anything to do with me- I'm not calling for a prostitute anytime soon, nor do I plan on. But my proposal here is that this passage has a lot to do with all of us and our sexuality.

Two things to note:

1. Prostitution in that day was quite different back in the Roman empire of the time than it is in our time today. It could be equated with our more common sexual practices we have today, our common practices of sex with a casual or serious partner outside of the context of marriage.

Consider the following from historians of that time.

"If there is anyone who thinks that youth should be forbidden affairs even with courtesans, he is doubtless austere (I cannot deny it), but his view is contrary not only to the license of this age, but also to the custom and concessions of our ancestors. For when was this not a common practice? When was it blamed? When was it forbidden?" (Cicero, Pro Caelio 20.48, First Century BC)

Plutarch (First Century AD), about why a wife should not be angry with her husband if he is can't hold back is sexual urge with prostitute or maidservant: "She should reason that it is respect for her which leads him to share his debauchery, licentiousness, and wantonness with another women." (Plutarch, Mor. 140B, First Century AD)

2. The larger context of scripture envisions sex as being pursued in marriage. Sex with a casual or serious partner outside the context of a married relationship is pretty clearly ruled out of bounds (Heb 13:4). As such, any passage about sex outside of those bounds, regardless of if it's written about adultery, prostitution, or anything else- contains truths that are worth thinking about.

All that to say, then, I think we can learn a lot from this passage.

Now, You note that the passage is really divided in two, with the first part containing statements while the second part containing more the prescriptions/commandments sort of stuff. Let's talk about the statements first.

### **Three Statements or Facts about Sex**

#### *1. Sex is communal.*

Paul starts off by saying something rather peculiar- "Everything is permissible for me'- but not everything is beneficial." Scholars debate as to if Paul is trying to rebut a moral statement the Corinthians were using to justify their behavior, or if he was simply quoting a common moral maxim of the day and fleshing it out more in light of Jesus and his ways. Whatever the case, the way he wants to flesh it out is clear- "not everything is beneficial." What is he talking about? It reads at first as if he's talking about how certain "things" are beneficial for him and his personal morality, but upon further scrutiny we realize its not. Two things to note: the word used here literally is to bear with others, and it is used in all other instances in the book in the context of how things benefit others. In other words, as Paul is getting this discussion on sex started, he's thinking what is helpful for others, for the community. He has a communal understanding of sex, meaning sex is something we should talk about journey through altogether, because it is something that doesn't just affect us individually, but it affects us as a community- whether we're talking about us as a spiritual community or the larger communities we live in.

This may be something totally out of the blue for you- I mean, sex is something we deem as our personal business and no one else's. But well, again, the Bible has a different perspective. Laura Winner, a professor at Duke and a Christian, has some great reflections on this. In her book *Real Sex*, within a chapter entitled "Communal Sex" in her reflection on why this is the case, notes:

"Sex is communal because sex is real... What we do with our bodies, what we do sexually, shaped our persons. How we comport ourselves sexually shapes who we are. If we believe that sex forms us, then it goes without saying that it is public business, because how we build the persons we are- persons who are social and communal and political and economic beings- is itself a matter of social concern." Laura Winner, *Real Sex*

#### *2. Sex involves ownership of our bodies.*

Note Paul's second clarification points to this. Again, it read like it could be talking about general things, like I should let any vice like greed or gluttony or something like that take control of me. But if we look at how the word is used, again we get a clearer picture of what is going on. The word used here for "being mastered" is only used two other times in the Bible, and it's in the next chapter. See 1 Cor. 7:4. Here, it's talking about how, in marriage and the sexual relationship of marriage, each spouse's body actually belongs to the other; each spouse has ownership over each other's bodies. Back to chapter 6- I think this is what Paul is actually alluding here as well.

#### *3. Bodies are important- God owns them, and they have eternal significance.*

Most scholars think what is going on here in Paul's quotation here is that many people thought that the culture of the time saw sex as a normal, natural appetite, much like hunger. More than that, they viewed the material as passing and not important; only the spiritual was. And so hey, God is going to render food/eating null, why bother with getting caught up in it- just eat as you please... The same goes with sex.

Paul, though, makes this note: Bodies are important. And they're important for two reasons...

God owns them- following Jesus is a matter of who has the rights over our lives.

He will raise them- they, and all that they do, will have eternal significance.

### **Why sex outside of God's plan of marriage is a bad idea...**

#### *1. It forces Jesus to have sex with someone he doesn't want to have sex with. (v. 15)*

v.15- "members" refers to body limbs/parts. Because we belong to Jesus, and our joined with him together- we are seen as being his body limbs, his body parts. Given this reality of our joining to him, the logic is- sleeping with whomever we do sleep with is like taking Jesus making him sleep with someone he doesn't

want to. To be blunt, it's a little like being an accomplice in rape. Paul says this is simply... well, shocking. It's dishonoring.

### *2. It affects our core person (v.16-18)*

This is what verses 16-18 are talking about. The word "join" points to this, as does the quotation, which is taken from the humanity's creation in Genesis ("one flesh" is much more the physical union). And note the comparison with joining with God- surely it's not a bodily union, but a life union. When we join physically with someone, its more than just bodily union- there is more, there is personhood union- a giving of you very self, your life, your whole life. This is how God designed it in the beginning, though today we typically separate life union from body union.

This unique aspect of sex and sexuality may be in view when the passage continues to talk about how sexual sin is the only type of sin where we sin against our body (v.18). It doesn't make sense if it's just referring to our physical shell- we can think of others sins that damage our bodies, like drug abuse or suicide and such. It most likely refers to this unique aspect of how sex involves are very lives, our persons, joining together with another. If we join together as one with someone, and break and join with others, and do it multiple times- could it be that we are leaving a part of us with someone each time we move around, and so in a way lose ourselves? However this actually plays out, the point here is that somehow, sex involves our core person, our very lives.

### *3. Our bodies are God's- they are holy, bought, vehicles of worship. (v.19-20)*

Last but not least, Paul reiterates a key point- our bodies don't belong to us, they are God's. They are temples where he lives, they were bought by him. We need to glorify God with them, we need to learn how to worship him with our bodies. The real issue with sex isn't actually sex. It's about God and if he really has ownership of our lives, if he has the rights over every aspect.

### **Questions or Comments?**

Now, there's a lot to talk about concerning how this all impacts us. But before we get there formally, I'd like to open up our time for questions or comments.

Let's get down to some of how this all impacts us. A few weeks ago we heard from someone in our church who is a sex addict, and they talked about the struggle and journey in that. We have another story today, from a different place in life, that involves a being the victim of sex outside of God's context. It points to some of the truths we've discussed now, and helps us think of a way forward, especially we are realizing that we aren't aligned with God here and want to move forward.

### **Testimony**

Note the role of community, of hope, of Jesus and his grace.

### **Implications:**

What is he saying to you?

Restoration is possible. Are you broken in this area, in need of His touch?

Community is essential. Do you need to take a step and share with someone what's going on?

**Extra Study Notes:**

Jesus on adultery: Matthew 15:19

v.12- it is debated if these quotations/maxims are slogans the Corinthians actually used, or if they are general moral maxims of the culture that Paul is taking and refining for his teaching purpose. The argument that they are not slogans includes: a) In the rest of the letter, Paul makes it known clearly where he is responding to something they have said/written/thought. See: 1:12; 3:4; 7:1; 10:28; 12:3; 15:35. b) If they were slogans, it would seem like that Paul would have come down much harder than he does to correct incorrect theology. c) If they were slogans, why were they not used earlier?

v.12- "beneficial" is used in 1 Cor. 12:7 and 10:23.

v.13- the quotation could be extended to include "but God will destroy them both."

v.16- the quotation is from Gen. 2:24.

v.20- the word for "bought" is used Rev. 5:9.