

Study 9. 1 Cor 6:12-20

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Big idea: God has made us Holy. Be Holy with our bodies, at all times and in all ways.

Intro ice-breaker question

What is your favourite TV drama? What attitudes to sex underlie that program?

The key for the next two studies is to see how radically different Paul's portrayal of God's plans for us sexually and in marriage are from the dominant Gentile and Jewish views and practices of the time.

While we may see that these differences were liberating (picking up Paul's theme of the freedom Christ brought), we can expect them to have been disruptive and difficult.

This passage is considered one of the hardest exegetically in 1 Corinthians. But the main point is clear and simple: flee sexual immorality.

Research suggests that Corinthian attitudes to sex were varied, but generally different from Christian views today. Some thought sex was recreational, while minorities thought it either debased our spiritual essence and should be avoided, or was only for procreation. Some thought it was recreational outside marriage and for procreation in marriage.

The dominant view in Corinth was expressed in the male head of the household having the right to have sex with his male and female slaves, going to prostitutes, having sex with other men, and confining sex with his wife to producing legitimate heirs.

It is unclear if there were 'temple prostitutes' at the time Paul wrote (probably not), but there would have been prostitutes who were brought out at the end of dinners and religious festivals for the enjoyment of the men.

Husbands would generally be older than their wives, and both Greek and Jewish traditions considered conversation with women to be a waste of time.

Interpretation of this passage is made more difficult by trying to work out the eschatology of the Corinthians. Some claim they had an 'over-realised eschatology'. That is, they thought all or most of the benefits of Christ's victory had already arrived. Others had a more conventional 'now and not yet' eschatology, seeing Christ's victory inaugurating the end times, but many benefits awaiting Christ's return. Some commentators want to see the sexual freedom of some Christian Corinthians as evidence of an 'over-realised eschatology', which had them believe that it doesn't matter what they do because they are saved. We will see this probably misreads the passage.

An important part of interpreting this passage is to understand what Paul was responding to. What had they said that prompted this response?

Observation and interpretation

1. What do you think Paul was responding to in verse 12?

Probably the Corinthians' defence of their sexual immorality and idolatry (referred to in 6:9-10), and their claim that Christ had made them free so 'everything is lawful' to them.

2. What attitudes are evident in the Corinthian claim that "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both"? [they include the view that the sexual nature of the body is useless unless used for sex]
3. What contrast does Paul draw between the Corinthian view of the body and God's view?

Rather than being an 'over-realised eschatological' view that bodies don't matter, Paul seems to be saying that the resurrection shows that bodies do really matter to God and therefore we should be careful what we do with them.

4. Regarding verse 15, when else has Paul talked about dividing Christ? [1:13]
5. In what ways can we consider our bodies 'temples of the Holy Spirit'?
6. What does Paul include in 'sexual immorality'?

It's broader than prostitution. It covers all illicit sexual relations, e.g. incest, pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex and homosexual sex.

7. What is the main point of the passage?

Application / Implications

8. What do you think of the idea that casual sex (with a prostitute or someone else) makes you one with them?
9. Today, what things do you think Paul would include in his list of sexual immoralities?
10. Is casual sex ok as it doesn't hurt anyone else? Why?
11. How can we glorify God in our bodies?

Only using our bodies in obedience to God or in way that we could expect to please God. It sets up Paul's later discussion on marriage.

12. What films/shows (if any) should we 'flee' (i.e. avoid)? Why?

13. Do you think verse 18 is justification for pastors being more directed towards sexual sins than other sins (e.g. greed, vanity)? Do you think it justifies us being harder on sexually explicit entertainment than ultra-violent entertainment?
14. What responsibilities do we have to a Christian who appears to be caught in sexual immorality?
15. Is it OK for Christian film critics, police officers, customs officers etc. to view sexually explicit material?

The purpose of this question is to engage with the complexities of our workplaces, and Paul's low view of sexual gratification for its own sake.

16. If the only way to close down an illegal brothel is to employ council inspectors to visit the illegal brothel and buy sexual services, could a Christian employ a council inspector to do so, and could a Christian council inspector buy sexual service for this purpose?

Prayer ideas

- Thanks for the clarity of Paul's teaching.
- Help to flee sexual immorality.
- For our churches and wider society to adopt attitudes towards sex that reflect God's plans for it.