

Themes Of I Corinthians (Part 6)

Personal Relationships

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Given 12-May-07; Sermon #828

In this series of sermons I have done on the themes of the apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, we have learned a great deal about the city of Corinth and the effect that the society within that city would have on new converts. It is evident from what Paul writes in the books to the Corinthians that the city's culture had a huge influence on those people; and they brought many of those same attitudes, ideas, and sins—plain, old ungodliness—into the church with them. Paul, who was the founding apostle there and who had charge over this church, felt duty-bound to correct them on these matters and straighten them out because he loved them and wanted them to have good lives and to be upright and right in the sight of God.

However, as we have seen, they split into factions based upon their Greek ideas of wisdom and rhetoric; they proudly tolerated perverse sexual sin among them; they were judging by worldly standards; they conducted themselves atrociously at Passover services; and, evidently, their weekly Sabbath services were a circus at times. Paul had to reign them in, tie them down, and tell them what was what. As Paul said in chapter 3, verses 1-4, they were still carnal. They were babes in Christ who needed to be taught these things pretty much from scratch.

We have skirted another issue in these sermons. I have never really hit it straight on yet. That is, what were their personal relations like? What about their families? We need to consider Corinthian society from the standpoint of domestic relations. What was the Corinthian family like during Roman times?

Corinth was on the Greek mainland, but it was also one of the major cities of the Roman Empire. It was quite a Roman city despite being Greek, as well. Therefore, we could maybe think that the typical Roman Corinthian family was a lot like most other Roman families of the Empire, perhaps a bit more Greek than some, perhaps a bit more dysfunctional, too. After all, it was Corinth!

Notice how one scholar, Dr. Joe E. Trull, professor of Christian ethics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, describes just how the Greek and Roman women of the time were treated:

The respectable Greek woman lived a secluded life. Confined to her quarters, she did not emerge even for meals. Normally, she appeared in

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public only once or twice a year—during religious festivals or a relative's funeral. The reason for her seclusion is related to the role of the Greek wife.

Demosthenes explained the accepted role, "We have courtesans for our pleasure, prostitutes (or young female slaves) for our daily physical use, and wives to bring up legitimate children and to be faithful stewards in household matters." The wife's primary function was to bear a male heir for her husband. Love and companionship were to be found elsewhere.

In Roman society a woman had greater practical freedom. A Roman wife could appear in public with her husband and was allowed by law to initiate divorce, but beyond that, her rights were limited.

All we would have to do is add the typical Corinthian libertinism, and we could believe that family life in Corinth left a great deal to be desired. If the women in liberated Corinth did not participate in the general sexual freedom that has been attributed to Corinth, the men certainly did. It was just Roman/Greek practice that the men had such freedoms. There was either a hypocritical double standard of immense proportions, or there was just plain old sheer wanton behavior. There did not seem to be much else. This was Corinth, of course, and you have heard in the past that there is a Greek verb, "to Corinthianize." That meant to debauch ones self sexually.

Christianity's approach to marriage and the family is based on God's revelation of such matters as we have seen in the Old Testament. At that time, those were the only scriptures they had. I would like to start in Proverbs 31 and show you the dichotomy between the Jewish-Christian family life at its best, in terms of a woman's place, compared to the Greek and Roman—Corinthian—standard.

Proverbs 31:10-16 Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar. She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard.

This shows that a woman in Israel could buy and sell—and not just foodstuffs and things that she might need for her household. This is property.

Proverbs 31:17-28 She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms. She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants. [Here she is conducting a business on the side.] Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom [a certain amount of freedom of speech, too], and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her...

She is not just something to be used. She is not just something to produce children. A woman like this is to be honored and praised for what she does. This was allowed in Israel; this was toward what Israelite families were moving.

Proverbs 31:29-31 "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." [That is the husband speaking] Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.

The two quotations that I have just read to you—the one from Dr. Trull and this one from Proverbs 31—show a vast difference. Obviously, not every house, not every woman in Israel was like this; but this was the standard to which they could rise. They had the freedom to pursue this, whereas in Greek and Roman times and places these respectable, high-class women of the aristocracy were in many ways hidden, imprisoned, not allowed to do anything. Their only real virtue, according to their societies, was their production of heirs.

This is a true dichotomy, opposite ends of an extreme. God's way is so radically different from Greek and Roman ways that Paul essentially had to start from scratch. He had his work cut out for him to teach them a new and better way.

Here it is, the day before Mother's Day (in the United States), and I thought it would be a good idea to take a look at this theme of personal relationships, particularly church

relationships and marriage relationships as they appear in the book of I Corinthians. We will see as we go through this that Paul places all of his instruction on the motivating factor of bringing glory to God. That is what he is trying to show, ultimately; that is the reason he gives us for wanting to do these things he is teaching us.

As I said, the Corinthians had been newly called out of a world whose ideas were drastically different from the biblical standard. Very popular in their society were the Cynic, Stoic, and Epicurean philosophies of the Greeks. Gnostic ideas out of the East were beginning to arise in great strength and to attach themselves to religions. I do not know if you were aware that Gnosticism is not a religion of itself. It is a philosophy that religions absorb, and then the philosophy changes the religion! These ideas of Gnosticism were beginning to attach themselves first to Judaism and then to the Christian church. This thing was happening all over the Mediterranean world.

Underlying all of these ideas and philosophies was human nature. The "best" philosophies (if I can put that in quotes) make use of human nature, because it makes them acceptable to human beings. If these things are "good" for human nature, the philosophies tend to be very successful in being accepted. I cannot stop just with human nature, either, because underlying human nature is the broadcasts of Satan the devil, who sends out his attitudes that are totally anti-God (Ephesians 2:2).

Essentially, up to this point, we can say that the Corinthians knew what practical godly living was only if they came in contact with Jewish morality. The Jews were the only ones who had any resemblance of what God's revelation about marriage and family was. However, you really could not trust them, because there were two sides to their way of looking at things. There was the legalistic side, and there was also a libertine side. It just depended on which Jewish philosophy was encountered. Remember in the book of Acts, there were the Hellenists and then there were the Judean Pharisaical sort. You could not always trust the Jews, depending upon which group you might have met.

Because of all this, Paul had to explain Christian relationships to them from scratch. What we will find, though, as we go through I Corinthians—particularly in the middle chapters, six through ten—is that he makes use of various Greek philosophies to explain to them godly principles. Either he pulls the Greek philosophy out and says, "This is wrong, and this is the way that God looks at it," or he pulls the Greek philosophy out and says, "They actually got something right, and this is how God agrees with it."

Paul makes use of their knowledge of the Greek philosophies to teach them the right way. This is not to say that they Greek philosophies were anywhere correct. They might have gotten things correct from time to time, and Paul makes use of that, just as in Acts

17 where he uses the poetry to prove a point on Mars Hill.

The first section at which we are going to look is in I Corinthians 6, and this will have to do with relationships with brethren. If you will remember, I Corinthians 6 is the chapter on judging and suing the brethren.

I Corinthians 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?

I Corinthians 6:5-8 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

His approach in this section sets a pattern for how he approaches all these problems. While it is not always exactly the same, it is very close to the same. He lets them know in no uncertain terms that the church and its members are to function separately and differently from the world. That is why he uses the word *saints*." He says that they go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints. Using the word *saints* should have given them an understanding that they were set apart, that they had been consecrated, that they had been given a high calling, and that they had been made different from the world. We did not read it, but then he went on to say that the saints are to judge the world and angels (verse 2). If that is the case, then worldly judges are utterly unqualified to judge between brothers in Christ.

He is setting up an understanding that they have been called to an entirely different sphere of operations. Maybe they did not understand this when they were first called, but he wants to make sure that they understand it now. There is the church and then there is the world, and the two do not go together. They only overlap a little bit. In matters as important as disagreements between brethren, the ones in the worldly sphere who have no background in the truth have no rights, no knowledge, and no understanding to make proper decisions—godly decisions—that would solve problems between brethren.

Paul is telling them that they have made a huge mistake. As I may have mentioned in another sermon, it is like asking a five-year-old about high finance. The little child is

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absolutely unprepared and unable to answer questions and make distinctions about such things. The world, because it has no knowledge of God's way or has some false or tainted knowledge, cannot make a righteous decision.

Once Paul feels that he gets the point across that there are two distinct areas separate from one another, and he ratchets up his arguments. He does not just leave it at that, because they have done something wrong. It was not the world's fault. He goes straight to them and tells them that it is a spiritual failure on their part to have taken their brother to court in the first place. It was a sin. That is a hard pill for a carnal-minded person to swallow.

You could just hear the reaction: "Bu...but...he did this to me! How am I to get retribution? How am I to get paid back? Is not there some redress for this? I have been offended! I am out 600 drachmas (or whatever coinage you wish)! He owes me!" The apostle Paul very clearly says, "It is better for a Christian to accept the wrong done to him, to allow himself to be defrauded, than to take his brother to law (court)."

Why? Why is it a spiritual failure to take a brother to court? I suspect the Corinthians were scratching their heads at this point. I do not think that they were spiritually ready to handle this. Maybe they were, and Paul was right. Maybe they did have the background. Maybe he had taught them these things earlier. However, they certainly had not put them into practice up to this point.

This is fairly basic material, but it is putting it into practical application that is the hard part. To take it from the principle that Jesus set forth and put it into life is not easy.

Matthew 5:38-42 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

The next section is actually part of this.

Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your

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Father in heaven [just as God acts toward you]; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Paul has raised the standard way up in this section in I Corinthians 6. Human nature always demands its rights; that is one of its typical reactions. It demands its rights to such an extent that it will go to war to secure them.

Think about it for a moment. What is a lawsuit? A lawsuit is essentially a legal conflict. It is war. It is legal war, in a courtroom rather than on a battlefield. It is fought with words and arguments, with evidence instead of swords and arrows and worse. It is war nonetheless. It is one side against the other.

While, in principle, a lawsuit is designed to provide justice in a matter, but justice is terribly infrequent at best. A lawsuit almost always promotes division, rancor, and offence. Even when it is resolved, there is a high probability that neither side will be satisfied. That is why there are such things as an appeal to a higher court. What we find from Matthew 5:38-48 above is that a Christian—a converted person—will try to avoid these results by solving the problem before it gets to the point that war is the only solution.

A similar principle is found regarding the spirit of murder:

Matthew 5:25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Things have gotten a great deal worse because it has gone to the point where it is now in worldly courts, and the court has found against you, the Christian. Paul is trying to say in his section that a Christian—if he is acting in love, if he is trying to be perfect as God is perfect—will settle these things before they get to the point where they need to go to court. The Christian has already failed if they get to the point where there is no resolution before going to court. The converted person will not demand his rights and will concede the argument—even to the point, as Paul says here, of being defrauded.

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Why? The true Christian wants to keep peace and harmony with the church, to keep God happy with him; and he wants that other person in the church to maintain his relationship with Him. It is all out of love. It is a very high standard. How many of us, if we had a serious difference of opinion with somebody, would not want to take it to the next step just to win?

We have an excellent example: Jesus Christ Himself. There is a section regarding being obedient to masters, and it fits the general theme.

I Peter 2:19-23 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...

In a case where there is a disagreement between brethren, they should both be working toward settling this thing fairly and equitably before it gets out of hand. They should both be willing to back off and say, "No, you keep it," or "No, I was wrong," etc. They should both be willing to suffer wrong. In some ways, whichever one actually comes to that point proves himself to be the more spiritual of the two—the more converted. Who is keeping score, though? Only God, maybe, looking at and testing us with His eyelids, as it says in the Old Testament.

Yet, Paul is not done with his argument—he ratchets is up one more time. He says,

I Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

This is not a new section; this is a continuation of his thought about going to court against a brother. He adds another layer of argument here. If I may paraphrase, this is

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essentially what he says: "People who commit these kinds of sins will not be in God's kingdom. Some of you"—perhaps some who were engaged in lawsuits against other church members committed such sins regularly before being called by God—"he saved out of those sins by washing you in the blood of Jesus Christ and giving the Spirit of God to keep you clean."

What is Paul's point? He says, "Look, buddy, member of the Body of Jesus Christ, you do not have any rights except what Jesus Christ allows you." Why is that? He is our Redeemer. He bought us; we are His bond slaves. Why, then, are they fighting over rights that they do not even have? What rights do slaves have? Do they have a right to even live? That is the question here. If Christ bought us fully and He owns us and can tell us what to do, when to do it, to live or die at any time; if he has full control over us, what rights to we have to squabble about? "Why are you demanding something that you do not have because you are a slave?"

He says that you are totally obligated to Jesus Christ in everything. Because you are totally obligated to Him, He can tell you how to act. You are obligated to conduct your life after the example of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ—which brings us back to I Peter 2. Christ suffered when He did not have to. He did it voluntarily for us out of love. When He was reviled—and it was not ever justified—He did not revile in return. Since He owns us lock, stock, and barrel, we are obligated to act the same way when things go against us. Shut your mouth as Jesus did and give in, submit. How often does it say in the Bible to submit one to another in the fear of God?

Paul teaches them that they have to treat their brethren better in love, and doing so often demands self-sacrifice—giving up our rights and freedoms for their benefit. It does come back to our benefit in the end. This is also what he taught the Philippians. He is very consistent here.

Philippians 2:1-4 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Certainly, we should be doing that for one another in the church.

Section two regarding personal relationships is about sexual relationships.

I Corinthians 6:12-14 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

This is one of those places where Paul uses the Greek philosophies. Most Bibles do not show that these are quotes. The clause, "all things are lawful for me," is a catch phrase. It is probably out of Greek philosophy somewhere. It is similar to the Nike shoe commercial slogan, "Just do it," or the US Army's, "Be all that you can be." It was something popular bandied about just as something that everybody knew.

I think this is the best way to read Paul's argument here: When he says, "All things are lawful for me," it should be in quotes, as if someone in Corinth were saying that to him as part of that person's argument for why he allowed himself to do certain things. Paul's response is the next clause or phrase: He says, "Not all things are helpful."

Before we go any further, let me remind you that the word *lawful* should not be taken in terms of God's law. The word is more like our word *permissible* or *allowable*. "All things are permissible or allowable for me." Paul's response is, "Not all things are helpful." Then there is another one: "All things are permissible for me," and Paul says, "I will not be brought under the power of anything."

What Paul is saying here in verse 12 is that we may be free to do whatever we want; certainly God is not in the habit of sending His angels and stopping us from sinning at any point. Have you ever been about to do something sinful, and suddenly there is a bright light, and the sky opens, and down comes an angel who says, "Do not do that! That is against God's law." That probably has not happened to any of us, has it? (If it has, I would like to talk to you sometime.)

God allows us to sin, does He not? We are not supposed to, but all things are permissible. What do you permit yourself to do? That was evidently the way that a lot of people in Corinth and the Greek and Roman world thought. They could do whatever they wanted. Paul was saying that not everything is helpful, profitable, or beneficial. Even if we are going to take this kind of philosophy to life, we have to balance it with understanding that doing certain things at the wrong time—whether right or not—are going to produce bad results.

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This does not necessarily have anything to do with right and wrong. He is trying to get them to understand that even though we may have the ability and permission to do something, whether good or bad, we have to think, "How is this going to turn out?"

The following part would be like this: "Though we may be free to do these things, many of them are enslaving—addictive, destructive, and shameful. Why would you want to be caught under them? Why would you want to be under the power of something over which you have no control, even if they were good and right to do at some other time?"

This second part has more to do with sinful things, because usually good things are not enslaving, addictive, destructive, and shameful. He is trying to get the Corinthians and us to think that even though we may be able to do something and it may be fine by God to do them, we really need to think about whether the outcome of doing those things is going to be good.

That is the first thing he says (regarding I Corinthians 6:12) in introducing this section. Remember that this is regarding sexual relationships. The next thing he says is another quote: "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods." Evidently, this was a Greek euphemism. Do you remember what a euphemism is? It means an acceptable word or phrase for something deemed "not for polite company." It is saying something acceptable for something that is not necessarily so acceptable.

In English, there are a lot of euphemisms for God—gosh, golly—and for Jesus—gee, jeepers. Those are supposedly "acceptable words" in order to avoid saying what you really mean, which is God or Jesus (in an unacceptable way).

This phrase, this adage and proverb, "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods," really is, "Sex for the body and the body for sex." This was evidently a rather bacchanal way of expressing oneself in living one's life. It is very epicurean and hedonistic, and the people who thought this felt that sex was just so natural that it could be done at any time, anywhere, for whatever reason.

Paul's response is, "Do you think so? God will destroy both it and them." That is pretty definite. He does not side with them as they might have hoped he would decide. Paul agrees in verse 13 that sexuality is natural, but he reminds them that the sexual function, in the grand scheme of things, is rather a low and unimportant one. God will both destroy the body and the acts that it performs.

I do not know if he was necessarily thinking about sexuality in the Kingdom of God; perhaps he was. People who make it into the Kingdom of God will have some sort of

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spiritual body. It will not be the physical body we have now, but it will be a spiritual body. There will be no need for sexuality. Jesus says that people in the resurrection will be like the angels, neither marrying nor given in marriage.

The reason for sex, from a reproductive point of view, will be unnecessary; therefore, there will be no real need for sexual activity for pleasure, either. Thus, he says that there is an end to this. These things are designed just for our physical, natural lives. They have a purpose.

What Paul goes on to say here is that the body has a higher function than sex only. That is the way that these people came at it. The highest function of the body was sexuality. Sex for the body, and the body for sex—that is what they thought. The higher function that Paul points out here is that the body was given to us so that we can serve God; and, in turn, God provides for us. That is what he means by, "The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." This means that when we serve God with our bodies and minds, God provides for us. It is a reciprocal arrangement. "The body for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

He goes on to say that not only will He provide for the body in this physical life, but He will also raise us from the dead. This is how far He is willing to go to provide for us, for our bodies. We will be given a spiritual body such as Jesus Christ had as His resurrection. That is why he mentions Him here. "God both raised up the Lord and will in the same way raise us up by His power." God is interested in our bodies and what we do with them, but He is mostly interested in us serving Him and His people. These are the thoughts that Paul wants you to have in mind as we introduce this section on sexual relations.

I Corinthians 6:15-18 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! [God forbid!] Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality.

I really believe that the first part of verse 18 should be at the end of verse 17, because it completes his thought. Since he is giving us reasons why there should not be sexual immorality, he says right at the end, "Flee sexual immorality."

Here in this three-verse section is his first allusion to the metaphor of the body of Christ,

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on which he will expand later in chapter 12. He tells us here that we have been joined intimately with Christ—so intimately, in fact, that we are in His very body! We are parts of His body—members individually, he said, of His body. Whether honorable or of less honor, it does not matter. We are joined with Him as one.

That being the case, how ridiculous is it to think that Christ would be involved with a prostitute? It is very ridiculous. He would never bring Himself so low. However, when we commit sexual immorality, Paul is saying, we essentially drag Christ through the mud of our own sinful behavior. This should not be. This is dishonoring Christ greatly.

In verse 16, Paul is saying that the sexual act of a man with a harlot—or any woman not his wife—unites that man with her as one flesh. What he said without coming out and saying it is that when a man goes in to a harlot or any woman not his wife, he is essentially forming an unholy bond of marriage with her. Intercourse is the consummating act of the marriage covenant. This is not marriage—that is not what he is trying to say. However, he is saying the intimacy of the act binds the two of them together in the way that should be reserved only for the man and his lawful wife. It should be exclusive with the man and wife only.

On the other hand, we are united through the Holy Spirit to Christ, which means, because of this oneness of spirit, we should be conducting ourselves as He would. He would never commit sexual immorality. Since spiritual union with Him is to be the guiding force for our conduct, our desire to please Him should trump the desire to please ourselves. Flee sexual immorality. It dishonors Christ.

The union between a man and a woman through sex is so close and intimate that it forms a bond. However, our bond is with Christ. We should have no unholy bonds. We should have only the holy bond of matrimony and the holy bond of the spirit with Christ. Anything else is defiling.

I Corinthians 6:18 Every sin that a man does is outside the body...

Here is another quote from some philosophy. Somebody somewhere in a robe said, "Every sin that a man does is outside the body." Perhaps this is a Gnostic thing; I do not know. Here is Paul's response:

I Corinthians 6:18-20 ...but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

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For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

What Paul is saying is that this philosopher was out of his mind. Every sin that a man does is outside the body? It does not affect him? What was this guy thinking? Can you really sin and it not affect you?

Sexual sins are probably the worst among physical sins that one could do. Just think about it. It will only take you a moment. There are diseases like gonorrhea, syphilis, AIDS, and thirty-some odd more out there. Those certainly affect the body do not they? They do.

There are other things, too. What about the destruction that sexual sins do to the mind? Do not most serial killers admit that they did what they did out of sexual motivations? That is pretty perverse. Ted Bundy said that it was his interest in pornography that started him along the line of killing all those women.

Sexual immorality affects more than nothing, but that is what this philosopher said. Sins outside the body do not affect a thing. Paul says, "This is so ridiculous!" Sex outside of marriage is a perverse use of what God made for it, and the natural law that God set in His creation automatically produces penalties every time the seventh commandment is broken.

Sexual sins cause bodily disease, mental perversion, and emotional heartache. How many people have been messed up because they believed the lie of sexual freedom, and then later in life they got married and had all sorts of sexual problems because of the attitudes and actions of their youth? Because sexual sins ultimately cause spiritual separation from God, to say that every sin that a man does is outside the body is ridiculous. Paul was very correct to say, "You have got to be kidding!" Paul points out these themes of being holy and sanctified, that we have been redeemed from spiritual bondage and thus obligated to obey God. Our chief aim (verse 20) is to bring God glory in everything we do.

Right at the end of this, where he says, "and in your spirit which is God's..." he alludes to a principle that I think he was not ready to bring up quite yet to these people. They were so carnal.

Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust

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for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Not only was he alluding to the actual bodily sins of committing sexual immorality, but he was also saying that we can have mental sexual immorality. I do not think the Corinthians were ready to hear that yet, but the thought was there. Therefore, Paul said to "glorify God in your body and your spirit, which are God's."

The final section today is on the marriage relationship. I do not want to go through the whole chapter on marriage but just touch on the first part.

I Corinthians 7:1-3 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" [another one that should have quotes]. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

This next quotation, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman," is either from the Corinthians or from some Stoic or Gnostic philosopher. Both of these groups had ascetic extremes in which they would become rather monk-like and celibate. It may have been a quotation from an opposing faction in Corinth. We do not really know how many factions there were there, or on how many different subjects, either. There might have been a faction there who was quite ascetic versus the faction that was quite promiscuous. That promiscuous faction was saying the likes of, "All things are lawful for me," while the ascetic faction was saying, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman."

Regardless of how things were exactly in Corinth, he first addressed the promiscuous things, and now he is going to address the ascetic things. Maybe he felt he needed to address this other side of things because the way that he was teaching in chapter 6 might give the wrong impression—that maybe there should not be no sexual practice at all, ever, not even in marriage. Thus, he chose to balance.

Paul's answer is in verse 2: To avoid sexual immorality, sexual relations within marriage are good. The idea that it was good for man not to touch a woman is also too extreme. God created a man with a woman and put them together and said that it was good. Therefore, it is fine and proper that these things take place in marriage. That is where God designed them to take place.

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I Corinthians 7:4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

This was a shock, especially to those who thought they were free to do just about whatever they pleased. This was a ton of bricks. This is a major marriage principle in the New Testament.

Each spouse has authority over the other spouse's body. You are not your own—on two different levels. God owns you body, soul, and spirit; and your mate owns your body. Within marriage, the individual is two slots removed from authority over own sexual actions. God has first authority, and your spouse has second authority. If it is okay with the both of them, then you can go ahead. Christ owns us first, and our spouse has next dibs on our own body, as it were. We have to be extra careful with what we do with our body; we do not own us. This is a funny way to state this—it is hard for a carnal mind to grasp—but our actions have to pass muster with two other people before we get to decide on it.

If we practice sexual immorality, what have we done? We have damaged the two most important relationships in our life: with God and with our spouse. That makes sexual purity a doubly important matter.

There is another aspect of this verse that is not often spoken about. This is not its first meaning, but it can be applied in principle: It can be applied with a future aspect to it for those who are not yet of marriageable age. Those who are not married should not be committing any sort of sexual activity or immorality because their future mate has authority and actually owns your body, and you are to keep it pure for your mate.

This section applies to all people—married and unmarried. You have to keep yourselves pure because you are not your own. You do not have first choice over your own actions in this regard. You should not, even though you do. You decide whether you will obey or not. In all spiritual honesty, those two other parties have more say so than you do.

I Corinthians 7:5-6 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.

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Despite his previous hesitations, Paul concedes that sexual relations inside marriage are good and necessary, and he says here that each spouse should give the other his or her due. This means their conjugal rights—sexual intercourse. One should not withhold it from the other with only one exception: for fasting and prayer. He is saying that spiritual responsibilities come before sexual responsibilities in marriage. There might be other things, as well. Health might be an issue. There might be other family situations where it would not be right at that time to do it. That is a private matter between the husband and wife to know when to do and when to refrain. Paul is very careful to say that when this period is over, it should be resumed. Why? It removes a very major temptation from Satan the Devil. He will not have any ammunition in this regard any more when both husband and wife are sexually satisfied. They will not be tempted to stray.

Be smart about this and be wise. Understand the desires of your spouse. Understand their responsibilities and obligations. Work it out between yourselves in wisdom.

I Corinthians 7:7-9 For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am [Paul was single]; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Paul was a man without peer. He did not seem to have been tempted by illicit sex in the least, even in this highly sexualized culture. He called it a gift from God that this did not bother him. He was not tempted in any way, and he wished that everybody else had this same gift that he had. If they did, then things would be a lot better in the world.

He concedes that there are people with their sexual drive in high gear, and these things need to be addressed; therefore, he advises that the unmarried and widows remain single. However, if they needed to get married for fear of sexual temptation outside of marriage, they can marry, even though he felt that Christ was going to come soon. That is why he advised people not to get married. He thought, during the mid-50s A.D., that Christ was going to come at just about any time and that we need to be focused and single-minded on learning and applying the truth, getting ready for Christ's return (verses 29 through 33 or so). He says to "be without care," which means to be without distraction. He did not want them to be distracted by a spouse.

I Corinthians 7:32 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord.

If you are unmarried, you have the ability and time to devote to God. You will not have these distractions:

I Corinthians 7:33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.

Since there are many things a married person has to think about other than God in order to maintain the family, he was saying that, because time was short (as he thought at that time), it would be better if people did not get married. If they needed to get married, he would concede to them that it was fine; it was okay. He was not preaching under the direct inspiration of God and being spoken through, saying, "This is a commandment from God: No one shall get married from this time." He was not saying that at all. It is perfectly fine to get married and have sexual relations within the bounds of that relationship. Paul gave some very balanced advice here.

The remainder of this chapter deals with divorce and other things, and I do not want to go into that. I do want to go forward into I Corinthians 10 as we close.

I Corinthians 10:23-33 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness." If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD'S, and all its fullness." "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

In this portion of scripture appear the principles behind Christian conduct. As I said, I do not want to get into the specifics about meat offered to idols and such. Rather, I want to

pull out the principles that Paul lays down here on how to judge these things. If we keep these principles at the forefront of our minds at all times, we will have the best chance to avoid sin, avoid offending our brother, and to do good toward them.

Of the two major principles are these, the first is found in verse 24: "Seek the other's wellbeing." Seek to make the other person have good occur to them. While we may be free to do a certain thing, we have to determine whether it is helpful, profitable, beneficial, or edifying. Is it going to build him up? Is it going to make him a better person? Certainly, if it is against God's law, if it is harmful, destructive, or sets a bad example, hurting another's conscience, we should refrain from doing it, whatever it may be.

What this means is that we must take our eyes off ourselves. We have to stop thinking about what is good for us and have outgoing concern for others, thinking about what is good for the other person. This takes some practice and some time, and it takes a great deal of self-control. We have human nature, and it thinks of only I, me, and mine. We have to control ourselves and start thinking of the other person first. This is a very high standard, a very tough principle to put into practice.

The second one is found in verse 31: "Do all to the glory of God." We are His witnesses, the Bible says. We are to proclaim with our words and deeds the goodness and righteousness of God at all times, to show the world an example of godliness in everything that we say and do. This gets back to the redemption principle: We should do this because we owe Him that. He redeemed us from bondage to the world and from death through sin; therefore, He owns every fiber of our being. In addition to being others-centered, thinking about what is best for the other person, we also have to look out for God's best interests.

Philippians 2:12-15 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [this could have been written for the Corinthians also]; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.