



PRODIGAL

CHURCH

SERIES: PRODIGAL CHURCH

DATE SUNDAY, AUGUST 23, 2020

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SERIES TITLE: A NEW HUMANITY

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20, 7:1-7

The Apostle Paul was asked some very relevant questions about sex. Should we or shouldn't we be participating in sexual activity outside of marriage in keeping with what the culture of the time was doing?

Instead of saying a simple yes or no, Paul described to the Corinthian Christians who they were, who they belonged to and therefore, what their behaviours should be.

Paul had to remind the Corinthian church how this grace covenant works given that we're now set free from keeping the Old Testament law to become right with God.

It became problematic for Paul when the Corinthians assumed that being forgiven by Jesus' death on the cross meant that they were now free to sin rather than being freed from sin. Clearly a big misunderstanding that Paul needed to correct. In 1 Corinthians 6:12 Paul starts to correct them by quoting a common saying that was leading them astray.

¹² "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything.

Paul is quoting an apparently common phrase that was being used by the Corinthians to justify or excuse their sinful behaviours. By being free from the Old Testament law they were forgiven and set free by Jesus death and resurrection. By faith in the completed work of the cross they rightly agreed that Jesus had paid the price for their salvation. But now they thought they "have the right to do anything," In response, Paul now invites them to think like a Christ follower by saying "- but not everything is beneficial."

For Paul, it was 1. Old Testament writings, 2. Jesus' example and 3. wisdom from the Holy Spirit that become the tools for deciphering what actions were appropriate or inappropriate, acceptable or unacceptable, moral or immoral. So, without the Law to singularly refer to, the Christian is invited to ponder whether their actions meet the expectations described by the three categories above. Of course, over time common practice is also a helpful guide because the Christian community accumulates a collective wisdom about how to do this shared Christian life together.

Q1. In what ways, from the paragraph above, can we pull together wisdom from these sources to make good decisions?

For example, in a few weeks New Zealand is holding a referendum on marijuana use and also euthanasia. Nowhere is marijuana mentioned in the Bible so we're asked to consider whether its use is "beneficial."

Q2. In what ways can you apply Paul's formula for Christian wisdom to matters such as marijuana legalization?

Furthermore, Paul reminds the Corinthians of a common Greek philosophy which says:

¹³ You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both."

This saying captures the dualistic approach that Greeks had to life. If God is going to destroy both food and stomach then they have no eternal value. We can then treat our bodies as vessels for our own pleasure. Be that food, alcohol, sex, drugs etc. Then and now people with a dualistic mindset have separated body or physical things from spiritual things. In other words, faith in God is spiritual so what I do on a physical level is not important. My body is going to waste away and won't last.

Q3. While this Greek dualistic world view is different to the Christian perspective, can you see how simple and attractive this worldview would have been? Or to be more relevant -is outlived today? Have you seen this thought process before? How and when?

In the next verses, Paul takes the Corinthians down a totally new track to appreciate a Godly worldview about their bodies and their sexual practices.

The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Paul is saying that Christians are now one in body and one in spirit with Jesus. What an amazing revelation this is. By saying this Paul is again lifting the Corinthian church out of the dominant culture. Lifting them both out of the culture and up towards God. Essentially saying "you don't belong here; you're better than this."

Q4. If we are united with Jesus then Paul is saying that our behaviours should also be equal to that of Jesus. In what ways does Paul's high view of Christ being represented here and now affect our own choices?

Furthermore, Paul explains below with greater clarity whom it is that we belong to and why our choices and lifestyles should reflect Jesus. The price we were purchased with was Jesus' own life. Paul keeps reemphasizing the place we hold within Jesus own body and that the Holy Spirit dwells within our temples (bodies). The point being to give us a higher view of ourselves which Paul trusts will affect our behaviour. Read Paul's reasoning in the following verses:

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

This passage reminds us that our bodies are not our own. They're owned firstly by God because He bought them at a price.

Q5. If as Christians we don't own our own bodies what does this tell us about our approach to euthanasia?

Now Paul wants to define where sexual expression is contained and constrained within - that being marriage. It's helpful to note here that Paul, having been a Pharisee, will have previously been married. But it appears that Paul's wife must have died as he now celebrates being single and for that reason is now able to be solely committed to serve as an apostle of Jesus. But Paul is also equally qualified to speak about sexual intimacy. Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-4.

CONCERNING MARRIED LIFE

Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. ³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.

Paul's words above are a radical challenge to the Greek culture and our own 21st culture as well. However, within these words are also a radical departure from the selfish 'me first' attitude that can accompany sexual gratification. Paul sets aside any form of self-centered lust and invites married couples to seek first the sexual pleasure of their spouse as their priority. Translators have used the word "yield" which is helpful if you ever learned to drive a car in the USA. New Zealand roads use the words Give Way. Which is a directive to prefer the other vehicle over yours. The other vehicle goes first as it has the right of way.

Q6. The marriage bed is intended to be a blessing to each spouse. But sadly, the marriage bed can be very destructive if approached in a selfish way. What's Paul wanting couples to avoid?

Paul wants the marriage bed to be a place of sexual satisfaction thereby reducing the temptation created by the Aphrodite cult that surrounded and at this stage permeated the Corinthian church.

Q7. In what ways do you see Paul's approach to sex as being an extension of how Christians should be serving one another in everyday life?

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW THAT PAUL GIVES TO MARRIED COUPLES.

⁵ Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Setting aside your sexual activity for the purposes of prayer is found practiced in the church traditions of Lent. Lent is an annual Catholic and Anglican tradition that includes repentance and almsgiving. Christians commit themselves to this practice for the 40 days leading up to Good Friday.

Q8. Paul makes a very solid link between sexuality and spirituality. This isn't difficult to understand given that spirituality and sex are both personal and intimate. Does this comparison resonate with you? If so, how?

PAUL CONCLUDES BY SAYING:

⁶ I say this as a concession, not as a command. ⁷I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

Paul is speaking about the spiritual gift of celibacy. Celibacy is a commitment to a sex free way of life. It's being set apart solely for Christian work by being able to give this work your undivided attention. Celibacy is not everyone's gift but like any gift it's to be celebrated when exercised.

Q9. Have you ever considered celibacy as a calling? Do you know and can you celebrate people who're living this lifestyle successfully as Paul did?

NOTE:

As you'll appreciate this subject will open up lots of questions and potential past hurts. We have more from 1 Corinthians that discusses sex and relationships in the weeks ahead. Please be prayerful so that God's word about this subject brings healing and reconciliation with God and others in the weeks ahead.