

Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 6:12-20 - Just the Facts on Christian Sexual Ethics

Well, we are venturing into some very interesting territory here over the next few weeks because basically Paul is going to lay out for us a fairly detailed understanding of Christian sexual ethics. He addresses a whole host of issues related to sexual ethics including: Christian liberties, prostitution, intimacy within marriage, divorce and remarriage, singleness, how to treat your fiancé, and whether it's right to remarry after your spouse dies. He covers a lot of ground in a chapter and a half.

As usual, we're going to keep it PG rated because we've got kids. But I want to encourage you parents that you need to be having age appropriate conversations with your kids about what the Bible teaches concerning sex. You need to own this. Read through this section prayerfully and have some conversations with them. "Hey, I want to talk to you guys about what pastor Jason said at church..." and just launch in. No matter the age, now is the time.

Because the unbelieving world is already pedal-to-the-metal teaching the littlest of kids a worldly sexual ethic. They have no reservation and no shame in what they believe. Sesame Street just came out with a gay couple on their program to celebrate pride month. The world is non-stop teaching a sexual ethic.

The world has no moral compass at all. I was talking to someone recently and they basically said that they were just glad that their teenage daughter hadn't gotten pregnant yet - that was a big win for them. That's good, of course, but our understanding of the most intimate relationship possible is much richer than that.

Ironically, the same world that has no moral compass views our Christian understanding of sexual ethics as laughable and even hateful. Abstinence is mocked as a form of preventing STDs and pregnancy - even though it has a 100% effective rate. Conservative SCOTUS Justice Samuel Alito - who voted against Obergefell v. Hodges which legalized same-sex marriage - who is himself Catholic just stated from the bench that one-man/one-woman marriage is the old fashioned view. He still holds to it, but we're at a point where so-called conservatives are saying that marriage is just one man and one woman for life is old fashioned. Most republicans, by the way, favor same-sex marriage - Gallop recently published 55% support.

Listen, this isn't to pick on the LGBTQ crowd. We could point out that divorce is rampant, pornography websites account for massive amounts of internet traffic, sexually immorality is everywhere. What we need as believers is to have a robust understanding of all the Bible has to say about sexual ethics.

You know this, but it bears repeating: God created sex. And in the right context it's a very good thing. As Christians we can get so caught up in talking about all the bad that we forget the good. We need to understand both.

So, that's a really long intro to what we'll cover in the coming weeks.

Why does Paul begin talking about this now? Well, remember we just finished up a vice list - a list of sins. And in that vice list were 10 sins. Four of the 10 had to do with sexual immorality of one kind or another: sexual immorality, adultery, and in the Greek he uses 2 words for the active and passive partners in a homosexual relationship. That's 40% of the list.

And it's almost as though he can hear the objections coming. "But Paul, we've got Christian liberty; we can do whatever we want!"

Now, he originally gave this list as a reason not to go to pagans over small financial disputes, but he's taking very pointed shots at what the Corinthians were dabbling in. That's why he transitions to sexual ethics here.

So what's going on? It appears that the Christians in Corinth were actually committing all kinds of sexual immorality. We saw back in Chapter 5 that a guy was sleeping with his step mom. But here it appears others were going to prostitutes. **Read 16**

Now, if you're like me, you're thinking: How is that possible? How is it that the Christians in Corinth actually thought it was okay to go to prostitutes?

Well, I'm glad you asked. It turns out Christians who have been washed, sanctified and justified are still sinners. And although we've been redeemed by Jesus, our hearts are still often very deceptive.

Now, here's what I want to do: I want to unpack this section a little differently than normal. Rather than go strictly verse by verse, I want to unpack a simple logical order. Because if you simply read through this like we did, the flow of Paul's thought is a little odd. There's a reason for that. Paul is actually making a very eloquent rhetorical argument that is a little lost on us English speakers. It was brilliant in Roman times, but it doesn't carry as much force for us now.

I just want to give you the facts.

So here are the facts. The first fact is a little odd, but we need to understand it.

1) Within almost all areas of Christian ethics, there are areas of Christian liberty. **Read 12**

So here's what's going on. Paul mentioned 4 types of sexual immorality and part of what he was doing was poking at the Corinthians because he knows there's sexual stuff going on that should not be going on. **And** he knows what their response is going to be.

You remember that a month ago we talked about how the Corinthians had a slogan they liked, back in **4:6**: "Do not go beyond what is written?" That was a good slogan. Here, it seems there's another slogan they liked: "All things are lawful for me." He says that phrase twice here. But **look** over to **10:23** for a second.

Here he's talking about eating food sacrificed to idols. And again, he anticipates their response. It's the same response. **Read 23-24**

Why would they use this objection? Well, because if we are followers of Jesus we are part of the NC. We are no longer under the OC Law - the Law of Moses. And so they're referencing that. They're saying "Hey, all things are lawful for me!"

And while it is true that we are no longer under the OC Law, that doesn't mean we can just go do whatever we want to do. **1 Cor 9:21** says we are now under the law of Christ.

What they are claiming is that they have Christian liberty to go have sexual relations with whoever they want. That freedom in Christ allowed for that.

So what is a Christian liberty? In the Bible, there certain things that God commands and certain things that God forbids and a whole host of things that God just doesn't talk about.

If you want a vocabulary word it's adiaphoria: it literally means indifferent. There are things that good, faithful, mature Christian can do or choose not to do because the Bible doesn't talk about them. And these things are often frustrating because people usually have strong opinions on them.

Let me give you some.

Smoking. In the church I attended in high school smoking was considered a sin. It's bad for your health, it leads to cancer, so on. There's a big problem with that: there's nowhere in the Bible that says smoking is a sin. There's nowhere that says putting leaves in your mouth and lighting them on fire will send you to hell. Doughnuts are bad for you do we ban them? Butter is bad for you. Everything will give you cancer. So we need to be very careful about what we call sin.

Here's a list of liberty issues I found online: can women wear makeup or jewelry? What about tattoos or piercings? Is dancing okay? I had to sign a form in college saying I couldn't dance. Is that intrinsically sinful? What about watching movies or television - what shows should Christians watch? What Bible version you use. What type of car you use. How expensive your car is.

Those fall under the umbrella of liberties. There are limits to all of those things, of course. But we need to “not go beyond what is written.”

Even within marriage covenant concerning sexual ethics there are liberties that people have. Jodee and I do premarital counseling and usually the most interesting discussion is the last one on sexual issues. And it's funny because either the couple has zero questions - they aren't asking a thing. Or they have a million questions. And if there are questions it's usually about liberties: what's okay inside of marriage?

We're not getting into that here. But just know there are areas of liberty that some people are fine with and others are not. And because there are areas of liberty - and we're not under the Law - the Corinthians were saying that going to prostitutes was just an area of liberty.

Hey, we're free in Christ, we're not under all those laws that Moses laid down - so it's alright.

Answer: not a chance.

So fact 1 here is that there are liberties in our understanding of all Christian ethics, including Christian sexual ethics.

Fact 2) There are biblical principles that guide our liberties. Read 12

So one of the fun things in the Bible is when the biblical writers have a back and forth conversation. It's like they make up a mini dialogue because they know how people are going to respond to their points.

Here, we see it about liberties. Paul anticipates that when the Corinthians hear some of these sexual sins listed among people who don't make it into the Kingdom they're going to start flailing. They don't like that.

And here's the argument he imagines them making: “All things are lawful” to which Paul replies “not all things are helpful.” They shoot back again, “all things are lawful” and Paul replies “But I will not be dominated by anything.”

What he's doing is giving some biblical principles to guide our liberties. Now, let's be clear: whether or not someone goes to a prostitute is not an issue of liberty. It's sin - he'll get to that in a few verses. But, what he lays down are some principles to guide liberties. Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should. You could go get face tattoos and smoke like a chimney reading your KJV over a pulled pork sandwich and a beer but maybe that's not always the best idea.

Let me just say: it's always easy to criticize what other people are doing in their liberties, rather than considering our own lives. Rather than evaluating ourselves.

So what are principles that guide our Christian liberties?

Principle 1: Is the thing you're doing helpful?

You **can** smoke 3 packs of cigarettes a day. But is that a helpful thing to do? You **can** watch a ton of movies, but are you watching ones that are helping you grow in Christ and furthering the Kingdom of God? You get where I'm going.

There was a period like 5 years ago when a bunch of young people all seemed to be wanting to get tattoos. And they'd ask me if that was okay. And I don't really have any problem with tattoos, per se. But there's a reason they're asking, isn't there? They're not 100% convinced it's right and they want pastor man to give my stamp of approval.

So here's the spiel: technically it's not a sin; but is it helpful? Does it further the Kingdom. Does it bring glory to Jesus? Does it detract from the gospel? Or does anybody care? And the answer every time was “Of course it advances the Kingdom because it's a tat of a Scripture verse.”

Now, that's between them and the Lord - I'm not offended by tattoos at all. But this is the question we need to ask when we're talking about any liberty issue.

Principle 2: Are you dominated by this liberty? Maybe you're dominated by working out. Nothing wrong with working out or sports but has it become a dominating force in your life? Or are you dominated by video games? Or dominated by smoking? Dominated by binge watching television shows?

None of these things are inherently sinful, but they suggest a lack of self-control. That's the issue. Are you controlled by the Holy Spirit into self-control or does this thing dominate you?

You have to be honest. **Look** over at **10:23** again. He mentions another principle. **Read 23**

We saw this a minute ago, but there's a principle he repeats and then a principle he adds. He repeats the principle of helpfulness. And then he adds the 3rd.

3rd Principle: We should use our liberties to edify people.

The NIV says constructive. I'm going to give a shout out to the NASB here which I think gets it best: not all things edify.

That's the issue: edification. Christian maturity. Does what you're doing advance your own love and obedience to Jesus? And - more to the point - does it advance other peoples' love and obedience to Jesus? Or is it a distraction or a stumbling block? **Read 24**

The greatest commandment is the love the Lord you God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. The second? Love you neighbor as yourself.

Maybe you like a cold margarita on a hot Friday evening on the back patio. Great. But your buddy who came out of drunkenness is coming over and really has a hard time with being around any type of alcohol. You know what you do? You wait til Saturday when he's not there. Because you don't want him to trip up.

"But I have someone coming over Saturday who won't drink either!" You know what Paul would say: Then give every liberty you have for the good of the gospel. **Turn to Romans 14:13-23.** Here Paul is talking about liberties as it pertains to eating unclean meat - like pork and shellfish. Some Jewish believers - even though they knew we are no longer under the Law - had a hard time with just abandoning the food laws they held all their life. Same thing with alcohol. What's Paul's solution. **Read 13-23**

He puts no stumbling block in anyone way. If our liberty is going to cause someone else to sin, they we give up the liberty. "But it's our liberty! We can do what we want!"

4) Last principle: Can you do it in faith? **Read Rom. 14:23**

Can you drink a beer in faith? Can you watch that movie in faith? Can you eat a pulled pork sandwich in faith? Or do you feel guilt or condemnation. If you do, it's not from faith and even that thing that's okay for some is sin to you.

So those are all principles of Christian liberty: Is it helpful, are you dominated by it? Does it edify other people? Can you do it in faith?

Let's head back to **1 Cor. 6.**

Fact 3: Christians will often do whatever they can to justify sin. I'll read this passage in a minute. But let me point out that Paul believes that these people have been washed, justified and sanctified. He believes they are saved. And that they know better. But he also knows that even Christians make excuses for their sin. **Read 11-16**

So Paul is calling them out on their attempts to justify their sin. The first attempt is in **Vs. 13**. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.” What is that all about? Why is he talking about food? Isn’t the issue sexual immorality? Yes it is.

But what the Corinthians are doing is trying to lump all appetites together. When you’re hungry, what do you do? You eat. If you’ve got an itch, what do you do? You scratch it. If you have the desire to have sex what do you do? Go down to the pagan temple and hire a prostitute.

They were trying to lump all these appetites into the same category like it’s no big deal to go to a prostitute. If you compare the various translations you’ll see that the quotation marks are in different places for different translations. The ESV puts the quotation marks at “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”, other translations extend it to include “and God will destroy both one and the other.” I think it should extend to include “and God will destroy both one and the other.”

Here’s why: Because their whole philosophy of life is that it doesn’t matter what you do to your body. It doesn’t matter what you eat or who you sleep with because in the end, your body gets destroyed anyway. It’s like saying “you only live once” or “go big or die trying.” They were minimizing the importance of the body in the Christian life.

And they knew better. Look what Paul says. **Read 15-16, 19**

We’ll unpack these in a second. But Paul says “Do you now know?” You know why he says that? Because they knew. They knew better. He had taught them these things and their cute little slogans were all an excuse to justify their sin.

See that’s what happens in life. We have a clear teaching, a clear instruction in Scripture that we know is true. But we want to find a way around it. We want to justify it. We come up with clever arguments to somehow get around what we know to be true on the face of it.

Sometimes we even pepper in quasi-biblical sounding things to do it. “The body is meant for food” - see God made us with these appetites and they have to be filled up. And God’s going to destroy us anyway. That sounds very theological indeed. The problem is it’s wrong.

Fact 4: Every molecule of your body and soul belong to God.

What comes next is basically a barrage of biblical truth about our bodies. And the bottom line is all of your body belongs to God. And God has a specific instructions for what we do with our bodies. So here’s a list.

1) Your body is not meant for sexual immorality. Read 13

Your body - and every function of your body - is designed by God for God. Even sex. I remember talking to a new believer once about sex and how within the marriage covenant it is an act of worship to God. And he said “Shut up - no way.” Way. The Lord made your body and he also commanded married people to be fruitful and multiply. Last I checked obeying commands is an act of worship to God.

We don’t just get to toss up our hands and go “We’re all gonna be dust anyway so we can do whatever.” Imagine a 16 year old kid trying that with borrowing their parents car. “Hey mom, can I borrow the car?” “Sure, honey, drive carefully.” “Mom, what does it matter, it’ll just end up in a scrap heap anyway and turn back to dust.” “Honey, you’re never driving my car again.”

Our body is God’s. What you do with your body matters to him because it belongs to him. And he does not want us to be using the his body for sin.

2) Your body will be raised. Read 14

This is a quick point, but this is why I believe it is the Corinthians who said “and the Lord will destroy one and the other.” Because Paul responds by saying - true, but we will also be raised. The body you’re sitting in right now - to some extent - will be the body you have for all eternity. If you’re in Christ, your body will be raised

from the dead and glorified when Jesus returns. It will no longer be weak or susceptible to death or corruption, but it will be your body. Get used to looking at your mug for a while.

Paul's point is simply that the argument that our bodies will return to dust and be gone forever is actually a denial of the resurrection. This is something the Corinthians were doing - more on that in **chapter 15**.

But what Paul seems to be hinting at is what you do with your body will have eternal consequences. When we read about pictures of Jesus in heaven, what do we notice about his hands and feet? He's still got scars even though he's glorified.

3rd Truth: Your body is a member of Christ. Read 15-16

We see this truth all over the NT - that Christians are part of the body of Christ. And although it's an illustration, it's helpful to understand. When you became a Christian, you were united to Christ as much as your hand is united to your body. Or as much as your ear is united to your body. Every bit of you is united to Christ.

Can you imagine Jesus going down and have sexual relations with temple prostitutes? Of course not. There's no chance he'd ever use his body that way. We'll you're part of his body. It's a play on concepts but it's true nonetheless. And if you're part of his body, there's no way in the world you'd ever do those things. You'd never go join Jesus's body with any kind of sexual immorality. **Read 15**

That word at the end is the strongest negative possible in Greek - me genoito. God forbid! Never! Absolutely not possible!

Now, listen, we're I'm going to pause here and we'll get to this next time. But I need to end on this. There's a reason that 4 of the 10 sins in his vice list above are sexual in nature. Why?

Because we've all sinned in that way. And all probably struggle to one extent or another in those ways even now. The truth that Paul made clear last time is still clear this time.

If you are a follower of Christ you have been washed, sanctified and justified in the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of our God. You are fully forgiven and you are fully righteous. What we do from here is go live lives of purity that show that we are fully forgiven and fully righteous.

Pray