

| 1 Corinthians |

Week 10 Scripture Guide | 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Biblical Context

Immediately after discussing the church's righteous judgments in an unrighteous world, Paul resumes addressing the topic of ecclesiastical sexual purity. The righteous saints who will judge the world in God's kingdom (1 Cor 6:2) were submitting to the judgment of the unrighteous (*adikos*), who they should know¹ will not inherit the kingdom of God. The sins that characterized the unrighteous were the same that used to characterize the Corinthian believers before they came to Jesus.² But, the saints have been washed, sanctified, and justified in Jesus by the Spirit of God to no longer walk in the sinful patterns from which they have been set free (6:11). However, Paul addresses their apparent pursuit of these old sin patterns and promiscuity. He begins by quoting Corinthian maxims that indicate their justification of "an indiscriminate exercise of their rights."³ He does not attack their illicit behavior, but confronts "the theology on which that behavior is predicated."⁴

The phrase "All things are lawful/permissible (*ἔξεστιν, exestin*)" is best colloquially translated "I have liberty to do anything!" and is a part of the Corinthian theology that believers have been granted liberty from the law to continue to live in sin (1 Cor 6:12; cf. 10:23).⁵ Paul quips two responses to this maxim, "but not all things are helpful (*συμφέρει, sumpherei*)...but I will not be dominated (*ἐξουσιασθήσομαι, exousiasthesomai*) by anything."⁶ Exploiting their liberty, the Corinthians were doing harm to themselves and the church by allowing sinful patterns to dominate them. In Jesus, believers are free *from* sin, not free *to* sin. The Corinthians viewed all bodily functions as "generally equal, and basically irrelevant for the life of the future."⁷ Paul uses the Corinthian maxim, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" (6:13a) to assert the implication of how the Corinthians walk this out in practice, "sex for the body and body for sex." Gratifying a sexual desire for the Corinthians was as natural and normal as satiating hunger.⁸ In all, the Corinthians are saying this, "Because I have liberty to do anything (6:12) and all bodily appetites are alike, and food is for the stomach like sex is for the body, (after all, God will destroy them both), then sex does not really matter." Paul counters this faulty thinking with his own maxim, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality (*porneia*), but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (6:13b). Rather than be destroyed, God will raise us up like he raised up Jesus (6:14). "This affirmation stands in bold contrast to the Corinthian view of spirituality, which apparently looked for a 'spiritual' salvation that would finally be divested of the body."⁹ This plays out as a view of there being no resurrection of the dead (15:12) with the further implication of there being no bodily resurrection of Jesus (15:16), thus they still bear their sin (15:17).

Paul further unpacks his slogan, "The body is not for *porneia*, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body," by giving more *ouk oidate* ("Do you not know?") statements. The Corinthian believers ought to know that their bodies (which are meant for the Lord) are members of Christ (1 Cor 6:15). Yet, some Corinthians were exercising their "liberties" by having sex with prostitutes (*πόρνη, pornē*). The biblical principle found in the Genesis creation narrative is applied, here, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Matt 10:16; Mark 10:7). When one has sexual intercourse with another

¹ The phrase οὐκ οἶδατε (*ouk oidate*, "Do you not know?") is used 10 times in 1 Corinthians, six of which are in this chapter (3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24). When Paul uses this phrase, he is rhetorically asserting that the Corinthians ought to know a certain truth but are acting as if they do not.

² Of the sins mentioned here, six are mentioned in 1 Cor 5:11. Three new sins have more explicitly to do with sexual sin, the subject matter of chapters 5-7. The sexual sins are *moichoi* (sexual relations outside of marriage), *malakoi* (passive/submissive homosexuality; lit. "soft"), and *arsenokoitai* (active/dominant homosexuality; lit. "male bed"). Sexual immorality is not merely acted out, but is also a heart level issue (cf. Matt 5:27-28).

³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 461.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 278.

⁵ The liberties that the Corinthians are taking are with sexual immorality in general and prostitutes in particular (1 Cor 6:15-16), also eating food sacrificed to idols (cf. 10:23). However, it is possible the the Corinthians are taking liberties with the other sins mentioned in 5:11 and 6:9-10.

⁶ Ἐξεστιν (*exestin*) a form of ἐκ + εἶμι. Cf. ἐξουσία (*exousia*, participle, "authority"), and ἐξουσιασθήσομαι (*exousiasthesomai*, "be dominated / mastered," "under authority"). The play on words Paul uses would be understood as "I have liberty to do anything," but I will not let anything take liberties with me." Or, "All things are in my power, but I shall not be overpowered by anything." Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 253.

⁷ Fee, 280.

⁸ Paul is not here coming against the Corinthians desire for food, but uses the slogan to point out their issue with sexual immorality.

⁹ Fee, 284.

(in this case, a prostitute), “the two become one flesh,” creating an enduring bond intended by God for marriage between one man and one woman.¹⁰ By walking out their warped theology, members of the church were having sex with prostitutes but ought to have known that they were becoming one flesh with them (1 Cor 6:16).¹¹ As a city between two seaports in the crosshairs of world trade, the pagan religious influence in the city was rampant. In ancient Corinth, the highest peak of the Acrocorinth was home to the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of sex. Pagan acts of worship were conducted by copulating with both male and female temple prostitutes, and these prostitutes would often come down to the city to sell their craft. The misunderstanding of Christian liberty meant the Corinthians saw no conflict and openly walked in blatant sexual sin which was damaging to the body of Christ and the individual. Rather than openly walk in lawless promiscuity, Christians should humbly walk in faithfulness and purity. When one puts their trust in Christ, he is joined to the Lord and becomes one spirit with him (6:17).¹² John Calvin puts it well, “Our connection with Christ is closer than that of a husband and wife.... For if he who is joined to a woman in marriage ought not to have illicit connection with a prostitute, much more serious in the case of believers, who are not merely one flesh with Christ, but also one spirit.”¹³

As a fulcrum between sections, Paul offers first a negative injunction. Rather than indulge in sex, he urges the Corinthians to “flee (φεύγω, *pheugō*) sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18a; cf. 10:14).¹⁴ This is an imperative statement meant as a summary command to escape from all the forms mentioned in chapters 5-6. Of all the sins mentioned in Paul’s letters, the sin of sexual immorality is the only sin that is against one’s own body.¹⁵ Paul rhetorically asserts the Christians that their body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within them (6:19); therefore, they are called to sanctification and chastity.¹⁶ The truth is that Christians no longer belong to themselves or their previous master of sin, but now belong to God, because Jesus paid the price with his life that we might be set free from beings slaves to sin (6:20a).¹⁷ We belong to Christ. The fact that we have been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus, and our bodies are now temples of the Holy Spirit whom God has given us requires a response. Following the command to flee *porneia* (6:18) comes a positive injunction, “So, glorify God in your body” (6:20). As God’s people, the goal is that he will sanctify us completely—our spirit, soul, and body sustained until the end, kept blameless and guiltless until the coming of our Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6; 1 Thess 5:23; 1 Cor 1:8).

Connection and Application

The Christians in Corinth were bombarded by the surrounding culture that unequivocally promoted immorality and debauchery. Formerly slaves to this lifestyle of sin, the blood of Jesus has purchased, washed, sanctified, and justified them. Yet some continued to walk in an active sin lifestyle. Rather than be free *to* sin, Christians are set free *from* their sin to faithfully serve God in holiness and purity. We are not our own. Our bodies are members of Christ (1 Cor 6:15a) and a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19). In a cultural context where sex is casual and sexual purity is passé, Christians are to flee all forms of *porneia*, glorifying God with our bodies. Because of Jesus we can confess, repent, and receive forgiveness. Set free, washed, sanctified, and justified.

¹⁰ “...Paul was far ahead of first-century cultural assumptions in perceiving the sexual act as one of intimacy and self-commitment which involved the whole person; not the mere manipulation of some ‘peripheral’ function of the body.” Thiselton, 474.

¹¹ Malachi 2:15 reads, “Did he not make [husband and wife] one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.”

¹² In 2 Cor 11:2, Paul says, “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.” In Eph 5:32, he talks about how the marriage between one man and one woman is a mysterious picture of Christ and the church.

¹³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 219.

¹⁴ The same word (*pheugō*) is used in 1 Cor 10:14, “flee (*pheugō*) from idolatry” and is prefaced by an important principle. “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (10:13). A biblical illustration of this principle is found in Genesis 39 where Potiphar’s wife attempts to seduce Joseph and he physically flees (Heb. נָטָה, *nws*, Gr. φεύγω, *pheugō*) temptation to avoid sinning against God. Avoiding sin is not something that should simply be managed, but something that we as Christians are called to flee and even put to death (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:24; Col 3:5; Heb 12:4).

¹⁵ “Every sin a person commits is outside the body” is suggested to be a quoted Corinthian maxim justifying sin. He corrects any misunderstanding by explicitly saying that the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Proverbs 6:32 says, “He who commits adultery...destroys himself.”

¹⁶ Paul applies corporate temple imagery (1 Cor 3:16) to the individual believer regarding sexual purity (6:19). The pagan temples of the day reflected the nature and name of their god, bearing their images. Paul is emphasizing that Christians should reflect God’s nature and pursue holiness as God’s temple.

¹⁷ The picture here is ancient slavery. Corinth was populated by former slaves, still had slaves, and many prostitutes were sex slaves. Slaves could be “manumitted” (set free) by the decision of their owners, or their freedom could be purchased by themselves or others. Before Jesus, we were all slaves to sin (John 8:34; Rom 6:16-22) unable to free ourselves. Our freedom has been purchased by the blood of Jesus and we now serve him (1 Cor 7:22-23).