

We’re going to continue in our series through Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church; if you have a Bible with you (paper or electronic), please turn with me to 1 Cor. 6:12-20. If you are going to use the Blue Bible located in front of you, you can find our text on page 1777.

Last week, as we approached vs. 1-11, I asked the question: *what does Jesus have to do with business?* It’s an important question to answer because it begs a deeper question: *what does Jesus have to do with my everyday, day to day life?*

All too often we mistakenly assume that Jesus is more interested in our praying than in our parenting. We mistakenly assume that Jesus is more interested in our bible reading than in our business practices. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus **is** interested in every dimension of our lives.

To borrow an illustration from last week, like a stone dropped in a pond, Jesus intends for His influence to be like a ripple advancing in concentric circles. His intent is to extend His influence in our lives until every dimension is marked by His love, His goodness, His strength, His wisdom. When you hear me talk about Jesus extending influence, don’t think simply about “control,” as if that is all Jesus cares about; think about being drawn into His love, into purpose and meaning...this is what happens when we walk under the influence of Jesus.

Earlier this week, I received an email from someone in our church, reflecting on last week’s sermon. She gave me permission to share the following: *“I’ve been blessed by your message, **It’s just business’** though I am not a business person...I’m starting to*

understand that if there are still areas of my life that don't reflect God's impact, it's because I haven't invited Jesus to be King in those areas...I love the Lord and want to follow Him but yet, in practical ways, there are still sooo many stop signs before Him in my heart...areas where I choose not to invite Him in...Yet Jesus is still loving and patient!! His goodness just leads me to repentance!!

Jesus is loving and patient, and His goodness gives us a rock solid assurance that He is for us, and that His forgiveness and transformation always stand ready.

This morning, in vs. 12-20, we’re going to be introduced to another area of life over which Jesus is both Lord and King; the area in question is sex and sexuality. Please follow along as I read.

*“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. **13** You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. **14** By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*

***15** Do 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! **16** Do 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.” **17** But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*

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.

As we dig into God’s word to us, through Paul, I would like to ask and answer two questions: (1) why does the church talk so little about sex?; and (2) why does Paul seem to talk about it so much?

I grew up in the 70’s and 80’s...and I’m not sure I ever heard my pastors use the word “sex” in church. It’s not that they didn’t know what the word was, at least I think...they did have children after all...I think it was more a matter of hoping that if they didn’t talk about sex, people wouldn’t obsess about it.

I’m not picking on my pastors; their mindset was present in many churches. The problem was that both the culture around them, along with the people they pastored, were already obsessed with sex, and the church’s silence simply allowed everyone else to define the meaning and purpose of sex.

So why did Paul talk about sex as much as he did? As you read through Paul’s letters, you will find that he regularly calls his people to submit their sexuality and their sex drive to Jesus; his reasoning was twofold.

First, Paul reasoned that if Jesus was involved in creating everything (including sex), then Jesus knew better than anyone how something was intended to function (including sex). And second, Paul continued to bring up the subject of sex because of its prevalence in the culture that surrounded him.

One scholar writes, “In a culture where one could matter-of-factly say, ‘Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children,’ the Judeo-Christian moral restrictions on human sexuality were not easily absorbed by...converts. Paul therefore had to address this question regularly in the Gentile churches.”¹

Is our culture so different?

Illus: I saw my first pornographic image when I was 12 years old. It is frightening for me to think that by today’s standards, with all the accessibility one has, 12 years old is rather “late” to see one’s first image. One of my friends from school invited me over to his house, and at one point we went downstairs to his bedroom. As I walked downstairs, the door to his dad’s workshop was open and there on the wall was Snap On Tools calendar with a woman posing on the front.

On that day, I was thrust into a reality that I had been previously unaware of, but ever since I have been bombarded by images, songs, movies, and messaging regarding sex...it is everywhere. You cannot

¹ Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, 197.

drive by a bus stop, tune in to hear a comedian, walk through a grocery line, or turn on the t.v. without being reminded that our culture is obsessed with sex.

If you read the article I assigned last week, then you will likely agree with John Stackhouse when he says, “our society repeats to us the contradiction that sex is no big deal *and* that sex is the most important thing in the world.”² If your Bible is still open I want to turn your attention to vs. 12-13; here, Paul begins to address the Corinthians’ questions. Let’s begin with the question of freedom.

1. *The question of freedom.*

Allow me to paraphrase vs. 12. Paul writes, *You say, ‘I have the right to do anything’ but I’m telling you that not everything is good for you. You say, ‘I have the right to do anything’ but I’m telling you that the exercise of “freedom” can lead you into slavery.* At the root of the matter is the question of freedom in Christ: *what am I free from? And, what am I free to do?*

Reading between the lines of Paul’s interchange, it would appear that some of the Corinthian men were frequenting prostitutes and arguing that they were “free” to do so. Now, we need to keep in mind that in the 1st century this kind of behaviour was both legally and culturally acceptable. To quote one scholar, these Corinthian men “were not asserting some unheard-of new freedom; they were merely insisting

on their right to continue participating in a pleasurable activity that was entirely normal within their own culture.”³

As we’ve said over and over again throughout this series, once Jesus saves us, He calls us to be set apart in this world, meaning, He begins to take the “world” out of us. Were the Corinthians “free”? Yes! Free from condemnation, free to follow Jesus, free to receive the Father’s love! But they were not “free” to do whatever they wanted; that kind of “freedom” leads back into slavery.

illus: The one who has a passion for clothes, can quickly become a slave to fashion, to the thoughts and opinions of others, to “needing” the latest and the greatest. The one who has a passion for sport can become a slave to endorphins, to winning, to having the “perfect” body. In the same way, the pursuit of sex can lead to slavery. It can become all one thinks about, dreams about, lives for.

The issue of “freedom” is tied to the issue of “ownership,” but Paul saves that for later in the text and so will I. Let’s move on to the question of appetites.

2. *The question of appetites.*

Take a look at verse 13, and allow me to paraphrase. *You say, ‘When my stomach is hungry I feed it, is it not the same when it comes to sex? Besides, our bodies don’t matter; God will destroy them in the end,’ but [says Paul], I’m telling you that our bodies were made for*

² John Stackhouse Jr., *The Reality of Sex* (Web Blog), <http://stackblog.wordpress.com/2008/03/13/the-reality-of-sex/>

³ Richard Hays, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians*, 102.

for the Lord, not to indulge our appetites...besides, God has big plans for our bodies.

In 1943, while the Great War was devastating Europe, C.S. Lewis was invited to give a series of lectures on the BBC; these lectures were later consolidated into a book entitled *Mere Christianity*.

In one of these lectures, entitled “Sexual Morality,” Lewis had the following to say, “Chastity is the least popular of the Christian virtues. There is no way of getting away from it; the Christian rule is, ‘Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your [husband/wife], or else total abstinence.’ Now this is so difficult and so contrary to our instincts, that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it now is, has gone wrong. One or the other.”⁴

For decades now, we have been fed a constant stream of lies about sex, and shame on us, because too many of us have believed them. We’ve been told that we should not put boundaries around our sexual appetite because it is no different than any other.

When we are hungry, we go to the fridge and get some food to eat. When we are thirsty, we turn on the tap and get something to drink. And when it comes to our sexual appetite, we’ve been told that we must feed it...that we must not think in terms of right and wrong, but in terms of need and pleasure. But Lewis points out, “Everyone

knows that the sexual appetite, like our other appetites, grows by indulgence.”⁵

He offers the following illustration. “You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act--that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover (**illustrate**) so as to let everyone see...that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food?”⁶

My dear friends, was true of Corinth is true of Vancouver; our appetite for sex has gone wrong.

More than ever before, we need to learn how to think “Christianly” about sex. We need to invite Jesus to extend His influence to this part of our life and clarify the meaning, the purpose, and the boundaries of sex. Now, this morning, I’m not going to come close to saying everything there is to say about sex, let alone all that the Bible has to say on the subject. But in the time remaining, I’d like to follow Paul’s argument, focusing on three key images: *resurrection*, *temple*, and *ownership*.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 95.

⁵ Lewis, 97.

⁶ Lewis, 96.

1. First, resurrection. The Corinthians’ thinking went something like this: *God doesn’t care what I do with my body because in the end my body is going to be destroyed. So...as long as my spirit is in tune with God, I am free in the present to do whatever I like with my body.*

Allow me to offer an analogy: if you know your car will soon be on it’s way to the junk heap, how important is it to change the oil? I had a friend with this perspective and he used his car in an unofficial demolition derby.

Our culture has a different mindset than the Corinthians, but the net result is the same. While the Corinthians downplayed the body’s importance, our culture glorifies it. But like the Corinthians, when we fail to make the connection between this life and the life to come, life in the present gets messy and out of alignment with God.

Paul responds to both mindsets in vs. 13-14: *“The body...is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord...14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.*

In the bodily resurrection of Jesus, our own bodies have been stamped as belonging to eternity; when we look at Him, we see what awaits us. Richard Hays writes, “The resurrection reconfirms the Creator’s love for the creation. Therefore, the body matters. To misuse the body is to hold the Creator in contempt...If we could learn to think of our bodies as bodies with a future, we might be more careful about what we do with them now.”⁷

⁷ Hays, 108.

⁸ Stackhouse.

We tend to think that this life is the only one that counts--because it is the primary one we see, taste, and feel--and so, we chase after every desire and appetite until we are satisfied. But as resurrection-people who belong to the future, we are invited (with God’s help) to live the life of the future in the present.

But Paul is not done talking about resurrection; he’s just getting started. In verse 15-17 Paul writes, *“Do 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! 16 Do 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.” 17 But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.”*

If we are not paying close attention, Paul’s logic can leave us behind. In these verses, Paul is making one basic statement: *sex and resurrection have one thing in common; they join us to someone.*

Let me quote from the Stackhouse article: “Most basically, sex *joins*. Sex *unifies*...the Bible uses a pretty obvious metaphor for...marriage: “the two become *one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24). Sex...*marries* one person to another. Most cultures around the world recognize this fact (for fact it is). No matter how elaborate their wedding rituals, no matter the power of the vows they take and the pronouncements made over them, the couple isn’t truly married until they have sex. Sex *joins*.”⁸

And so does resurrection. Romans 6:3-5 tells us that in baptism we are united with Jesus in His death and resurrection: we have both died with Jesus (to an old sin-filled life), and been raised with Jesus to new life. Resurrection joins. In 1 Cor. 6:17, Paul says we are united with the Lord and are one with Him in spirit.

Did you notice that in Paul’s argument against sleeping with prostitutes, he doesn’t once mention the sacred bond between husband and wife? While this is a sacred bond, and he does mention it elsewhere, Paul has something else in mind here. Here he pleads with them saying, “*You cannot have illicit sex because sex joins...it makes two people one...and you have already been made one with Christ. You must not unite what belongs to Christ with what is unholy.*”

Stackhouse writes, “We ourselves become delusional about sex, and in this one crucial respect: We keep thinking that sex can be just what we want it to be, rather than what it is.” Sex *joins*, so does resurrection, and we need to make decisions about who we are united with.

Now let’s focus on Paul’s second image: the temple.

2. Temple:

In verse 19, Paul expands our understanding of the union that exists between us and God. He writes, “*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received*

from God?” Through the Holy Spirit we have been united with Christ.

In 1 Cor. 3:16, Paul made the point that whenever the people of God gather together, God the Holy Spirit is present, dwelling among them...together, they are a temple of the Holy Spirit. But here, Paul makes the point that within every individual follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit chooses to dwell.

Do we not know that our bodies have been made for more than the abuse of food, or sex, or narcotics, or sport, or...our bodies have been made to house the living God. Too often we think of God’s instructions as being restrictive, as though God is inviting us into *less*. This is a lie...God is inviting us into *more*, not *less*. The *more* God invites us into is fueled by His indwelling presence.

illus: In 1996, Sheryl Crow wrote a song with the following lyrics, “*If it makes you happy, it can’t be that bad, if it makes you happy, then why the hell are you so sad*”. It would seem that Sheryl has figured something out that many haven’t.

Premarital or extramarital sex is neither “normal” nor “inevitable.”⁹ Our bodies have been made for something more than sexual immorality; anyone who tells you differently is feeding you a lie. Our bodies been made for the Lord and nothing else will bring us lasting satisfaction.

And finally, with one last image, Paul brings his argument to a conclusion. Paul’s concluding image is that of ownership.

⁹ Hays 108.

3. Ownership: the reason we flee from sexual immorality is because our bodies do not belong to us, but to the Lord. One author writes, "this is the argument that most directly challenges us today. Once we confess that we are not our own, that we have been bought with a price, all talk of sexual autonomy becomes nonsense. We are not free to do anything we like, not free to invent our own standards, not free to behave as moral 'free agents.' We are bound to a relationship of obedient faithfulness to Christ."¹⁰

illus: it is amazing how quickly the matter of ownership can settle a dispute. In my own house, my kids never fail to find “creative” uses for nearly every household object. Couches become trampolines, remote controls become hockey sticks, and decorative pillows become lethal weapons.

Whenever I find household objects being misused, I often bring my kids back to the issue of ownership. *Who does this couch belong to?* “It belongs to you and mom.” *So who decides what this couch is supposed to be used for?* “You do.”

Sex doesn't belong to us. Because sex belongs to God we cannot define it however we wish. If we are followers of Jesus, our bodies do not belong to us; our bodies belong to God and they are His to direct as He sees fit. But as I've already said, God has *more* in store for our bodies, not *less*. Giving ourselves over to sexual immorality not only takes away our dignity, it takes away from our ability to enjoy God's indwelling presence.

And, as strange as it might sound, the way we think about, and engage in, sex is part of our witness here on the North Shore. As I said last week, as followers of Jesus we have been “sanctified,” that is, we've been set apart to represent Jesus here in Vancouver. Jesus' intent is that as we follow Him, living everyday life in Vancouver (working, playing, eating, and relating to sex), that in our living Jesus will be on display for everyone to see.

Everywhere we go, we go in Jesus name. Every word we speak, we speak in Jesus name. Everything we do, we do in Jesus name. It doesn't make any sense for Jesus to rule in our sanctuaries but to be banished from our bedrooms, our relationships, or computers. Jesus wants to extend His influence to every area of our lives, and for every one of us, that includes the way we think about, and engage in, sex.

Guided Prayer

¹⁰ Hays, 109.