

# **Challenges Christians Face**

## **Flee Sexual Immorality**

*1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

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# Flee Sexual Immorality

## Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of sexual freedom. Let's learn about this in a message I am calling, "Flee Sexual Immorality."

Let's read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20:

<sup>12</sup> "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. <sup>13</sup> "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup> And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. <sup>15</sup> 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 prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." <sup>17</sup> But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. <sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

## Introduction

As you read the history of the Christian Church—and I hope you do!—you will soon discover that the Church has not always behaved well.

You will discover that Christians throughout the ages engaged in practices that were considered acceptable in their day. They thought that they were following Christ, but today we realize that they were cultural blind spots.

You will find examples of this in every period of history: the atrocities of the Crusades, the executions of heretics, the wars between different denominations, the horrors of slavery, the sin of apartheid, and the list goes on and on.

You read about these examples and wonder how Christians could ever justify such bad behavior. How could the Church ever have endorsed such horrific practices?

The fact is that God's people have been behaving badly ever since the beginning. In his letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul addressed a cultural blind spot in that church. He wrote to them about the practice of visiting religious prostitutes.

Corinth was well known in the ancient world for widespread prostitution. In Paul's day prostitution was often associated with pagan religious practices. The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, stood on the highest peak overlooking the city of Corinth. The thousand female prostitutes who served there contributed to Corinth's reputation for immorality. The word "Corinthianize" described the prostitution that was going on in Corinth. Pagans believed that participating in religious prostitution promised good fortune and blessing from the gods.

Some in the church were convinced that religious prostitution was a benefit to their spiritual lives as they continued the practice.

From our modern outlook, it is hard for us to believe that any Christian could think this way. And yet, that is exactly the situation that the apostle was dealing with when he wrote to the Corinthians.

We may not have this particular cultural blind spot. But, we have our own blind spots. By looking at what Paul said to the Corinthians about their cultural blind spot, we can learn how to deal with our own blind spots.

## Lesson

In today's lesson we learn about the evils of sexual sin.

I would like to use the following outline for today's lesson, which I have taken from John MacArthur's *1 Corinthians*:

1. Sexual Sin Harms (6:12a)
2. Sexual Sin Controls (6:12b)
3. Sexual Sin Perverts (6:13-20)

### I. Sexual Sin Harms (6:12a)

First, notice that sexual sin harms.

Paul said in verse 12a, “**All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.**”

The statement “**All things are lawful for me**” may have been a common slogan in Corinth. But, as commentator Gordon D. Fee says, “The source of the slogan is debatable.”<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that the Corinthians had turned one of Paul's statements into a slogan to justify their sexual sin. But, if that is the case, they had misunderstood how Paul used the statement.

Paul would have meant, “**All things are lawful for me in Christ.**” For Paul the qualification would have applied to what we call the *adiaphora* (that is, the things indifferent, or the non-essentials) and not to biblical ethics.

The *adiaphora* refers to those “things or actions that in themselves are neither immoral nor moral, or neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture, and thus may be permitted for Christians.”<sup>2</sup> And so it refers to things such as what one can eat, drink, wear, how one observes certain days, and so on.

With regard to biblical ethics, *The ESV Study Bible* states, “From the beginning of the Bible to the end, God gives people specific instructions about how he wants them to conduct their

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 252.

<sup>2</sup> George Thomas Kurian, *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary: The Authoritative Resource on the Christian World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).

lives. The study of these instructions and their wise application to life is known as the discipline of biblical ethics.”<sup>3</sup>

So, Paul is saying that with regard to the *adiaphora* a Christian is free to do whatever he or she wants to do. In this regard, **“All things are lawful for me.”**

However, with regard to biblical ethics a Christian must do what God has commanded in his Word. He cannot do what God has forbidden. And clearly God has commanded that all sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage between a man and a woman is forbidden. God said in Exodus 20:14, “You shall not commit adultery.” That general prohibition covers every area of sexual sin.

Now, Paul continued in verse 12a, **“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.”** Paul is saying that with regard to the *adiaphora*—even though he is free to do what he wants to do—**not all things are helpful.** What he means is that some things may not be helpful to himself or to others. While a person may be free to eat certain foods, it may not be good for his health. Or, while a person may be free to drink certain drinks, it may not be good for others. And so on.

An example here may be that of alcohol. While a Christian is free to drink alcohol, it may not be helpful to do so in the presence of someone who is an alcoholic.

Paul will address this whole issue later in his letter (in 1 Corinthians 10:23-31), and he has also addressed it in his letter to the Romans. Suffice it to say that with regard to the *adiaphora*—even though things may be lawful for the Christian—they may not be helpful.

And, with regard to sexual sin, it harms. Sexual sin harms in every conceivable way. As pastor and author John MacArthur says, “Involvement in illicit sex leads to loss of health, loss of possessions, and loss of honor and respect. Every person who continues in such sins does not necessarily suffer all of those losses, but those are the types of loss that persistent sexual sin produces.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2535.

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 148.

So, sexual sin harms.

## II. Sexual Sin Controls (6:12b)

Second, notice that sexual sin controls.

Paul said in verse 12b, “**All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything.**”

Paul repeated the slogan, “**All things are lawful for me.**” But this time he says that he **will not be enslaved by anything.**

Paul would not become **enslaved** to anything or anyone, other than Christ. He certainly did not want to become **enslaved** to sin, for he wrote in Romans 6:14, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

John MacArthur says that “no sin is more enslaving than sexual sin.”<sup>5</sup> The more one indulges in sexual sin, the more one is enslaved by it. Often it begins with a small indulgence, and then it leads to a greater indulgence, until one is enslaved by it.

Some of you may remember Ted Bundy. He was the infamous serial killer of as many as 50 young women. On the day before his execution in 1989, Dr. James Dobson interviewed Bundy. Dr. Dobson asked Bundy to explain what had happened to him. Bundy said that he grew up in a wonderful Christian home with two dedicated and loving parents, along with 4 other siblings. As a young teenager he encountered pornography at the local grocery store and in people’s garbage. After a while, Bundy said, “you look for more potent, more explicit, more graphic kinds of material. Like an addiction, you keep craving something which gives you a greater sense of excitement.”<sup>6</sup>

Bundy was describing what the Psalmist described thousands of years earlier when he talked about the progression of sin in Psalm 1:1, “Blessed is the man who *walks* not in the counsel of the wicked, nor *stands* in the way of sinners, nor *sits* in the seat of scoffers.” Do you see the progression? *Walks—stands—sits.*

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<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 149.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.tldm.org/news6/bundy.htm>.

So, sexual sin harms. And sexual sin controls.

### III. Sexual Sin Perverts (6:13-20)

And third, notice that sexual sin perverts.

It especially perverts God's plan and purpose for the bodies of Christians. I want you to see three truths about the body of a Christian.

#### A. *The Body Is for the Lord (6:13-14)*

First, the body is for the Lord.

Once again Paul noted a slogan that the Corinthians used. They said in verse 13a, **“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.”** From the way Paul is using the slogan it appears that the Corinthians were saying that “sex is no different from eating: the stomach was made for food, and so the body was made for sex.”

But Paul disagreed with their thinking. It is true that eating food is a biological activity needed to survive. On the other hand, sex is a gift from God to be used only as God commanded. Paul asserted that, despite the natural order of food for the stomach, **“God will destroy both one and the other”** (6:13b).

Commentator Richard Pratt notes, “That God will destroy both food and the stomach does not necessarily imply that food and stomachs will not exist in the new heavens and the new earth. Paul probably meant that God would destroy stomachs and food as they are now recognized and experienced.”<sup>7</sup>

The body is designed by God for much more than merely biological functions. So, Paul said in verse 13c, **“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”** He had in mind that we are to use our bodies in such a way that God is glorified in our bodies.

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<sup>7</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr., vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 99.

One reason we are to use our bodies to glorify God is because one day we are going to receive new, glorified bodies. Because Jesus was raised to life, we too will be raised in new, glorified bodies to continue worshiping and serving God. That is why Paul said in verse 14, **“And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.”**

So, the body is for the Lord.

*B. The Body Is a Member of Christ (6:15-18)*

Second, the body is a member of Christ.

Paul said in verses 15a, **“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?”**

This is really a stunning statement. Paul’s words make it clear that Christians are not merely spiritually joined to Christ. Christians are so intimately joined to Christ that even our bodies are united to him. Christians are literally Christ’s body on earth.

That is why Paul asked with shock, **“Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute?”** And his answer is a strong, **“Never!”** (6:15b).

Again he asked, **“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?”** (6:16a).

Sexual relationships are not casual. It involves a union between two people, **for, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh”** (6:16b; cf. Genesis 2:24).

**“But,”** said Paul, **“he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him”** (6:17). Paul’s point is that a Christian who commits sexual sin involves **the Lord** in that sin. All sex outside of marriage is sin, but when it is committed by a Christian it is especially reprehensible, because it involves Jesus, with whom the Christian is united. When a Christian commits a sexual sin with another person, he is involving Christ in that sin. John MacArthur notes that “Christ is not personally tainted with the sin, any more than the sunbeam that shines on a garbage dump is polluted. But

his reputation is dirtied because of the association.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul commanded those who are engaged in sexual sin to **“flee from sexual immorality”** (6:18a). The Greek indicates that one is to keep on fleeing and to continue fleeing until the temptation is past. A person should be like Joseph who fled from Potiphar’s wife when she tried to seduce him. He fled from her presence.

Then Paul said in verse 18b, **“Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”**

In contrast with **every other sin**, immorality is **against** one’s **own body**. The meaning of these words is difficult to determine. Many sins, such as substance abuse, gluttony, and suicide, have detrimental effects on the body. Paul’s words do not refer to disease or other damage caused by sin. Instead, his words are linked to the preceding discussion of verses 12-17. There Paul established that Christians’ bodies are joined with Christ so that they become “members of Christ” (6:15) himself.

Sexual union with a prostitute violates one’s body by bringing it into a wrongful “one flesh” union, and by flaunting the mystical union with Christ (6:15). It is in this sense that sexual immorality is a unique sin against the body: the body is a member of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

### *C. The Body Is a Temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19-20)*

And third, the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Paul asked in verse 19, **“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?”**

Not only is the body of the Christian from the Lord, and a member of Christ, it is also **a temple of the Holy Spirit**.

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<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *I Corinthians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996), 151.

<sup>9</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr, vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 101.

Committing a sexual sin in a church sanctuary, sickening as that may be, would be no worse than committing the sin anywhere else. But Paul is saying that every time one commits a sexual sin, it is committed in God's sanctuary, because that is the **temple of the Holy Spirit**.

Furthermore, Paul noted, **"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price"** (6:19b-20a). As a Christian, you no longer have any rights to your own body. You are no longer free to use your body any way you please. Just as slaves were bought in the ancient world, Christ bought you, body and soul, with the price of his own blood. Because you now belong to him, you do not have the right to rebel against God by using your body in any way the Lord has prohibited.

Your body has one supreme purpose, which Paul stated at the end of verse 20, **"So glorify God in your body."** Just a few chapters later Paul wrote, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Paul's call to Christians is to understand that the body is for the Lord, the body is a member of Christ, and that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

## Conclusion

It is easy for us today to see how Christians in the past had cultural blind spots that were actually sinful. It is important to realize that we also face the same temptation ourselves. We are so easily influenced by the standards of the world. When we grow up in a culture that tells us that certain practices are good, we tend to embrace these practices even as we follow Christ. We then follow wrong cultural practices because we are blind to their evil.

Let me close with two points of application.

### A. *God Has Defined What Sexual Sin Is*

First, God has defined what sexual sin is.

We live in a culture that is redefining what is sexually permissible. Earlier this year in the United Kingdom, Peter and Hazelmary Bull were found guilty of discrimination because they allowed only married couples to share a bed at their small hotel. A homosexual couple sued the Bulls because they would not allow them to stay in a room with a single bed. As cultural commentator Al Mohler pointed out, what makes this case particularly troubling is the nature of the judge's decision. Judge Andrew Rutherford ruled that the Bulls would have to sacrifice their Christian convictions if they intend to own and manage a hotel. The real bomb in the judge's ruling was in this statement: "Whatever may have been the position in past centuries it is no longer the case that our laws must, or should automatically reflect the Judeo-Christian position."<sup>10</sup> This is a growing view all over the world.

The fact is that even though the world may view the Bible as antiquated and outdated, Christians must stand firm on biblical truth. God has defined what sexual sin is, and we must not allow the world to re-define it to fit any and every perversion.

### *B. Christians Must Affirm the Sanctity of the Body*

And second, Christians must affirm the sanctity of the body.

When we talk about our union with Christ, which is one of the blessings of justification, we are not merely in spiritual union with Christ. Our bodies are also in union with Christ. Our bodies are good. And our bodies are holy. Therefore, sexual sin really does violate Christ by involving him in our sin. So, let us commit ourselves to glorifying God in our bodies.

May God help us to recognize our own cultural blind spots that may be sinful. And may we commit ourselves to flee sexual immorality. Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/01/21/now-it-is-the-other-way-around-the-moral-revolution-in-full-view/>.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181)
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz)

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## Challenges Christians Face

### **PRAAYER:**

Lord Jesus, we confess that we are prone to sexual sin, and that we fail to honor you properly with our bodies. Please forgive us, and give us strength through your Holy Spirit to flee sexual immorality. Amen.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

### **CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, as you leave here today, go and honor God in your bodies!