

17/01/2021 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Pastor Fraser Pearce

About 20 years ago I preached on this text
And received a note in the offering bowl
Suggesting that it was inappropriate for pastor
To mention such topics as fornication and prostitution in church.
Well, talking about fornication and prostitution from the pulpit
Is perhaps not a nice thing to do
But dealing with such topics is important and necessary
If we are to receive and hand on the whole of God's word together.

The fact is that this reading from 1 Corinthians
Is far from the only place St Paul mentions fornication.
So, for example, listen to this important passage from Galatians:
**Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity,
licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger,
quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy,* drunkenness, carousing, and
things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those
who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians
5:19-21**

The first work of the flesh that St Paul mentions? Fornication
And the warning that he attaches to his teaching?
those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
It's clear and strong teaching

It's also not as if this teaching is simply based on a hang up of St Paul
- It's not as if Jesus was a more easy going sort of fellow
Who wasn't so uptight.

Listen to this teaching of Jesus from the Gospels:
**For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come:
fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit,
licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come
from within, and they defile a person. Mark 7:21-23**

The first 'evil thing' mentioned? Fornication
That list was from Mark; the same teaching is given in Matthew

There fornication is mentioned only after murder and adultery.
So I think it's fair to say that when we receive and hand on teaching
On fornication, we are receiving and handing on teaching
That is significant to the apostles and to the Lord Jesus
And therefore also to the church: I'll try to hand on this teaching
faithfully today, as you receive it, test it against Scripture.

Now because 'fornication' is a word rarely used in spoken English
I think it's worth understanding that the word means:
Sexual intercourse between people not married to each other.
And in our day and age I think we need to be more specific
Sexual intercourse outside of the husband and wife union.

As a side note: it seems to me that the bible does not deal
With sexual orientation as we are inclined to do today.
So you won't find the term heterosexual in the bible
And you won't find talk of homosexuality or bisexuality either.
Rather, the bible deals with human beings created male and female
While acknowledging that within this dichotomy there are also
eunuchs who are recognised and treated with respect in the Scriptures.
The bible also recognises that human beings, male and female
Experience sexual desire that can take a very wide range of expressions
Which is, presumably,
why there are prohibitions of such things as incest and bestiality:
We human beings can get up to all sorts of things in the sexual realm.

As I receive it and hand it on, in the bible God gives marriage
As the place where sexual expression can be holy and pleasing to him
And a blessing to husband and wife.

OK, let's now listen to how St Paul teaches on this topic today
This is how he starts: **'All things are lawful for me', but not all things
are beneficial. 'All things are lawful for me', but I will not be
dominated by anything. 'Food is meant for the stomach and the
stomach for food', and God will destroy both one and the other.**

Scholars understand that St Paul is here quoting sayings
That were used by Christians in the Corinthians community
The first quote **'All things are lawful for me'**
Seems to be an assertion of Christian freedom
Indeed for St Paul, freedom is a great value to Christian people
But it's not the only one.

In his teaching St Paul, like the Lord Jesus, is going to give teaching
Based on holiness or purity, and not simply on freedom
(and we'll hear more about this as the sermon goes on)
That's why he says **but not all things are beneficial.**
Not every action of freedom, in other words, brings benefit

Likewise the quote **'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach
for food'**

Is understood by scholars to be a quote from the Corinthian Christians
Again, this quote can be taken to be
about the goodness of bodily existence
And that it is natural and good to fulfill bodily desires.
The desire for food is the desire explicitly mentioned
But the satisfaction of sexual desire is understood.
St Paul adds, **God will destroy both one and the other.**
The point is that we are accountable not simply
to the desires of our body however insistent they may be.
Rather we are accountable most fundamentally *to God.*

St Paul then comes to his main point

**The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord
for the body.**

We understand our bodies rightly

When we understand that our bodies belong to the Lord.

And it is by understanding Jesus in his bodily life

That we become free to live in a wise and holy way as God's people.

This is how St Paul goes on: **And God raised the Lord and will also raise
us by his power.**

Notice that St Paul does not start by telling us what to do
But rather by proclaiming to us the power of God.
If there is to be a holy way of living sexually
Then it won't come from human strength
But from the power of God at work in our lives
The same power that raised Jesus from the grave.

St Paul then goes on to give a specific example: **Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, 'The two shall be one flesh.'** But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.
St Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to understand their bodies
Not simply in terms of their experienced desires
But in terms of their bodily unity with the Lord Jesus.
It is entirely unfitting for Christians, who are members of Christ
To be united with prostitutes
Rather, Christians are one spirit with Christ
And are therefore called in into the same sort of faithful
Husband and wife union that Christ has with his bride the church.

St Paul then gives strong teaching that we need to hear:

Shun fornication!

I'd say it is better translated: *flee* fornication.

Perhaps this image could help: we in Australia flee bush fires
We know they have overwhelming destructive power
And we fool ourselves if we think we can fight them on our own.
Likewise we do well to flee from fornication
Because if we stay in the way of temptation,
we will be easily overwhelmed.

And Jesus himself taught us to pray: **lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.**

What St Paul then goes on to teach is a little more cryptic

At least until we get the imagery behind it.

He says: **Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself.**

Well, we could ask, what about gluttony and drunkenness

Aren't they sins against one's own body?

What St Paul goes on to say can make it more clear: **Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.**

There is temple imagery here

And the imagery of something holy being defiled, or made unclean

There is an appeal here to our ability to judge for ourselves

Not simply of what is unfair or uncaring or disloyal

Or restrictive of our freedom, but of what is impure or unclean.

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit

While fornication may not seem obviously to harm others

Like murder or adultery or theft do

It does defile and make what is holy unclean.

And the body, our very bodies, are the temples of the Holy Spirit

Places where the glory of God resides

And where God is to be glorified.

Let's end on these words: **For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.**

Dear Christian people: you were bought with a price

God, in his love for you, gave his Son for you

To take on your sin and shame, your guilt and uncleanness

And to bring you into a right relationship with the just and holy God.

With this God there is forgiveness of sins

And with the blood of Christ there is cleansing from all

That would make us unclean

Let us put our hope not in our own purity or strength of commitment

But in Christ Jesus, so that his resurrection power raises us up

Into a way of life where we glorify God with our bodies.