

FIRST CORINTHIANS

What Every Christian Should Know About Illicit Sex But Doesn't! I Corinthians 6:12-20

One of the few blessings to the modern phenomena of radio talk shows is Dr. Laura Schlessinger. She is a practicing Jew but very conservative in her views of love, sex, marriage and divorce. A major key to her success is that she tells it like it is; she speaks the language of the people and she is communicating. Today, I want to tell you folks like it is. Hopefully I will communicate this message in the language you can understand. However, I can assure you I will not be as blunt as Dr. Laura.

Corinth was a city given over to the worship of sex. A thousand prostitutes, male and female, came down from the Temple of Aphrodite into the city at night to carry out their wicked trade. An intimate part of the Corinthian pagan worship was involvement in sexual promiscuity.

Sexual immorality was accepted and highly regarded in that culture. Apparently there were some Christians who had not shaken all of their pagan past and were highly influenced by their sex-crazed culture. Therefore, there were some in the Corinthian church who argued that sexual immorality was right and proper for Christians. The problem of the church at Corinth is really the same problem the church in America faces-what to do with degenerating attitudes about sex and the ever increasing sexual laxity within the church. The American sex-saturated society is having a tremendous impact upon the church. In the Christian churches, there are many who say we need to soften our view of sexual immorality and even homosexuality and allow them to be practiced by Christians without recrimination.

RATIONALIZATIONS FOR ILLICIT SEX 6:12-14

Sex Is Not A Sin But A Questionable Practice 6:12

"Everything is permissible for me." The carnal Corinthians took a teaching by the Apostle Paul and twisted it and perverted it to justify their sin. The Apostle did teach that all things were permissible (lawful) but that teaching must be put in context. This saying, "All things are permissible for me," was within the context of doubtful things or questionable practices; that is, those things which are not specifically commanded against in Scripture for Christians. They fall into the gray area. In the first century, the questionable practices were eating meat sacrificed to idols, drinking of wine or observing Jewish holidays. Paul taught Christian liberty in questionable practices. He was no legalist. A legalist forces his convictions on the conscience of another. He looks at life and says, "Everything is wrong unless you can prove from a verse of Scripture that it is right." This is a negative approach to life and it takes all the fun out of living.

The Apostle Paul taught that everything is right except what the Word of God labels as wrong. God made the earth and everything in it, and He wants his people to enjoy life with gusto. Yet, these carnal Corinthians had become libertines because they perverted Paul's teaching on Christian liberty. They said premarital and extra-marital sex were not sin, and Christian liberty must be exercised in these areas. They perverted the truth like many Christians today pervert the motto of Augustine who said, "Love God and do as you please!" The Bible labels all sexual immorality as sin, but through the rationalization process they concluded "All things are permissible for me" could be applied to the area of sexual freedom. They were saying God's moral law had no relevance to them in the area of sexual behavior. They were free, autonomous men and women, and they would decide for themselves what was right or wrong. There were no absolutes, no external commands or principles to judge their sex lives. What they did with their bodies was a matter of personal, private ethics. It was for them a matter of Christian liberty or choice.

More and more so-called Christians in America are saying, "I'm free in Christ. I'm so free I can have premarital and extra-marital sex if there is true love. It is a matter of my Christian liberty and personal choice. These so-called Christians have confused Christian liberty in questionable practices such as dancing, movies, dress, alcohol, tobacco, body piercing with freedom in Christ and moral law. All illicit sex is a violation of moral law and will be judged by God. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb. 13:4).

But not everything is beneficial. While a Christian does have liberty within the area of questionable practices, the exercise of that liberty may not always be profitable or beneficial.

Even Christian liberty when taken to extremes can be hurtful. The moment the use of our Christian liberty begins to hurt us or someone else, we have fallen off into license, and we are as bad off as the legalist. The key word in Christian liberty is balance. Some things may not be wrong in themselves but it may not be wise for one's body, social life or spiritual life to practice them. For instance, a Christian is free to eat anything he wants and as much as he wants and whenever he wants, but that freedom may cause great hurt and not be beneficial. If a person has a sickness, it may not be good for him to eat sugar, although he is free to do so. If we are concerned about our health and the use of our bodies for God, then it is not wise to eat whatever and whenever we want. Just because we have Christian liberty does not mean we insist upon using that liberty. Christians willingly and gladly set aside their liberty to have a positive testimony before the unsaved world and to keep a brother or sister in Christ from stumbling. The mature Christian is never thinking about himself only but also about the winning of people to Christ and the spiritual growth of the church.

Everything is permissible for me -- but I will not be mastered by anything. Paul taught liberty in questionable practices, but he also taught the Christian should never allow himself to be a slave to any fleshly appetite. Things that are doubtful are often things which become enslaving. Yet, a Christian is not to be brought under the power of anything. The things

which hurt us often have a tendency to be habit forming. They are harmful because they give us a certain degree of pleasure which makes us not mind the hurt so much, but that degree of pleasure is habit forming, either physically or emotionally. A person who smokes a pack of cigarettes a day and is dependent on them is addicted to nicotine and enslaved to something other than Jesus Christ. Someone said, "It is easy to quit

smoking. I have done it hundreds of times." The housewife who cannot get going in the morning without two or three cups of

coffee is addicted to caffeine and controlled by something other than Christ. The businessman who begins to think about two martinis at four o'clock in the afternoon has become a slave to alcohol and not to Christ. These things indicate how easy it is to fall into patterns of habit. The things which are not helpful are often habit forming, and that creates a slavery of its own. When Christian liberty brings us to slavery, then it is no longer liberty but sin. It is a violation of moral law.

Paul taught Christian liberty but he never taught that any type of sexual immorality was a questionable practice and fell into the category of Christian liberty. All sexual hanky-panky of any kind is sin in the eyes of a holy God.

Sex Is A Natural Appetite Which Must Be Filled 6:13

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food." This apparently was another expression of the Corinthians and it sounded very impressive. The argument was the stomach is designed for food, and it is perfectly natural and right to satisfy one's need for food whenever it arises. Eating is a natural function, and the Corinthians concluded one body function is much like another. Fulfilling the sexual desire is as natural as eating a steak because nature demands satisfaction.

How often we hear from the secular world that sex is the second strongest desire in man and we certainly should not frustrate that desire. We have these God-given sex drives and they should find satisfaction. It is not uncommon in our American society to hear such sayings as, "if it feels good, do it!" or "If you have the urge, merge!" Human nature and arguments for illicit sex haven't changed much in two thousand years. The carnal Corinthians and the carnal Americans conclude that there are certain appetites in the bodies of men and women and it doesn't make any difference how people indulge these appetites in or out of the marriage relationship. When people adopt the mottos, "Sex makes us free," or "It can't be wrong if it feels so right," they mess up their lives making them distrustful of getting married, marriages end in divorce, families are torn apart and sexual addictions overcome many.

But God will destroy them both. The stomach and food are temporary and God will destroy both.

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord. The human body is not temporary; it is eternal. The Lord God created the body for Himself and will someday glorify the body of every true believer in Christ. The body is not to be used for vile gratification of the flesh, but it is to be holy and kept for God. The body was not made for sexual immorality but for God and it only finds its fulfillment and satisfaction when it is being used to glorify God as an instrument God can use in His service. For sure, the body does not find its satisfaction in an immoral fulfillment of sex drives as the Corinthians so wrongly reasoned. In fact, illicit sex can never be ultimately satisfied; it burns for more and more!

And the Lord for the body. This apparently means the body is designed for the Lord to dwell in. There is a dignity about humanity that is far greater than any animal can claim. The body is designed to be indwelt by God. It never finds real satisfaction and fulfillment until it is indwelt by God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Sex Only Affects The Body Not The Soul 6:14

By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. The resurrection of the human body is a unique teaching to Christianity. In the early church period there were many pagan philosophies and all saw a great distinction between soul and body--the body was temporal and earthly and the soul was eternal. The body was unimportant and the soul was all important. The result was that among the Greeks and Romans the body was used for all kinds of evil. Again the motto was, "Abuse the body but work on the inner man." But Christianity says the body will be redeemed; therefore, it is to be treated with dignity and purity.

In our American culture it is not uncommon to hear people say, "My body belongs to me and what I do with it is my business! If I want to unite with a prostitute, that is my decision! If I want to abort my baby who is part of my body, that is my business! If I want to abuse my body with alcohol and drugs, that is a private decision!" The thought behind this reasoning is that the body is not important. The important thing is the "real me" on the inside, and those who hold this philosophy cry out, "Can't you accept me for who I am in spite of what I do?" God says the body has eternal significance; therefore, what a man or woman does with the body is just as important as who he or she is.

REASONS FOR SEXUAL PURITY 6:15-17, 19-20

Paul gives three cogent arguments as to why Christians should not get involved in any wanton, illicit sex. He could have said that we should abstain from sexual immorality to protect our bodies, for today we live in an epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases. Thousands of Americans die yearly because of venereal diseases and thousands more are crippled physically and mentally. The dreaded disease AIDS has jumped the fence to the heterosexual community and it is always a killer and may yet wipe out great sections of our population. Paul could have said we should abstain from sexual immorality in order to prevent pregnancies. In spite of the pill, birth control and one and a half million abortions (murders) each year, we still have multiple thousands of illegitimate children coming into this world. Paul could have exhorted us to avoid sexual immorality to protect our health, for there are many emotional and psychological problems which arise because of illicit sex before and during marriage. He could have stressed the importance of sexual purity to protect our marriages, for we know that premarital sex is one of the major hazards to a normal adjustment in marriage. Many men and women have normal sex responses before marriage but cannot have them in marriage because of the guilt they have brought into the marriage. Extra-marital sex obviously hits at the basic foundation of a marriage. Paul could have given all these arguments and more but did not because he was dealing with what happens when Christians get involved in premarital and extra-marital sex.

Here are a few statistics from USA Today: Every day in the USA 2,795 teens get pregnant, 1,106 teens have an abortion, 7,742 teens become sexually active, and 2,256 children are born out of wedlock.

Position Of The Christian 6:15

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? At the moment of conversion the Christian was spiritually and organically united to the person of Jesus Christ who is the Head of the Church. Believers make up the body of Christ, the Church. The Christian's body has become a part of Christ's body. This is what makes sexual vice so obnoxious for a Christian; it is actually taking Christ into our illicit sex lives. When you go to bed with a person in an immoral union, you are actually taking Christ into that situation.

Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! By the act of fornication or adultery a believer voluntarily takes his body and makes it part of a harlot. When our bodies are used for illegitimate sexual purposes, we are robbing Christ of members of His body and his right to use those bodies for the specific purpose for which He ordained them. The Apostle Paul also implies when a Christian unites with a godless woman, it is equivalent to making Christ Himself commit prostitution, involving the Lord of Glory in a dissolute and reprehensible act. Paul emotionally blurts out, "Never!" This is an unthinkable, untenable and blasphemous thought.

Priority Of The Christian's Spiritual Relationship 6:16-17

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." This quote comes from Genesis 2:24 which is in the context of marriage, obviously referring to two becoming one flesh in the sex act. This being the case, any man who unites himself to a harlot by that sexual act becomes one body with her. What the Apostle is saying is that something goes on in the act of sex which creates a union far deeper than merely the passing pleasure of the moment. The Corinthians had not realized the implications of their sexual laxity. This becoming one body is a universal principle whether it is illicit sex between believer and believer, believer and unbeliever or unbeliever and unbeliever. Yet, the Christian who commits illicit sex has greater problems because of his rebellion to truth and ensuing Holy Spirit conviction. Sex involves two people sharing in a mystery and it is not just an animal act. There is an intimacy which can never be forgotten and will always be stamped on a person's mind to some degree.

"Some effects of illicit sex can never be undone (though of course they can be forgiven). Memories, emotions, and attachments stay with us for life, although excessive promiscuity can eventually dull or numb our senses in certain ways" (Craig Blomberg, I Corinthians).

This does not say, however, a person who has illicit sex is automatically married to the consenting partner or that the two have to get married when it happens. Marriage does not take place in God's eyes until the first half of Genesis 2:24 takes place: a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. Furthermore if the sex act constituted marriage there would be a lot of people who had multiple husbands and wives who have been legally married only once. What this verse does say is there is an emotional, psychological and spiritual impact in illicit sex which leaves its mark on every person who gets involved in it, and this act has profound ramifications to one's normal adjustments in marriage.

"In countless ways, women and men defy God and confidently proclaim that they can have sex without that commitment and without any destructive side-effects. Time and time again, they regret those choices. But this is not a sin we can test and then back off from; we must trust that God knows best. Once a person yields to temptation, in little or big ways, there are mental and emotional scars that may never entirely disappear, even though God's grace can bring substantial healing" (Blomberg).

But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. The Christian is one spirit with Christ and it is impossible to separate this union. You cannot divide a spirit. There is a oneness of spirit between the believer and the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the spirit union is higher than the body union, and higher unions ought to govern lesser unions. What one does with or in his body ought always to be governed by the higher union, for we are spiritually united to Christ

There is absolutely nothing which wrecks one's spiritual life like illicit sex. More men and women tune out in their spiritual lives over passion for illegal sex than for any other reason.

Presence Of The Holy Spirit In The Christian 6:19-20

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit indwelling his body and because of this he should not want to put himself in an unholy union with an immoral woman. The Christian's body is a temple, a shrine, a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are His temples, for He indwells each one of us individually. Since the Holy Spirit is in us, we can never go any place apart from the presence of God. We may close doors, pull down shades and turn off lights but the Holy Spirit is still present and we cannot escape His conviction. Since the Holy Spirit does indwell us, we ought to be very careful about desecrating or defiling the temple of God. Whenever a Christian involves himself in a premarital or extra-marital affair, he desecrates God's temple We can never defile God's temple without incurring God's displeasure and experiencing horrible guilt.

A Christian is not his own, for he has been bought by the blood of Christ. He is the possession of God. No Christian can ever say, "My body is my own and I can do what I want with it!" The Christian can only say, "My body belongs to God and I will do what He wants me to do with it!" Nor does the Christian have any right to abuse any other person's body when that body is the temple of God or a potential temple of God.

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" (I Cor. 3:16).

There was a young, beautiful flight attendant who was a member of the Fellowship of Christian Airline Personnel. One day she was serving coffee on a plane that had just taken off. As she came down the aisle she stopped beside a man who looked up at her and got her attention. He then opened his hand and showed her an explicit sexual object. She immediately got the implication. It was a bold pass and it shook her. She did not know what to do for a moment. She turned and went to the back of the plane to recover herself and there she prayed and asked God show her what to do because she had to go up to that man again. She went back and knelt beside his seat and looking him straight in the eye said, "Sir, I saw what you showed me and I understand what you meant and want, but there is something you need to know. I am a Christian and my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God says He is going to destroy anyone who damages His temple in I Corinthians 3:16." The man began to stammer and apologized. She said, "I understand. Don't say anymore. I just want you to know what the Bible said about your indecent proposal." Later she gave grateful thanks that the Lord had laid that verse on her heart because it served to deliver her from both the embarrassment and the threat of that situation.

Therefore honor God with your body. The whole purpose of salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is that we might honor and glorify God in our bodies. Therefore we should put away from us any thought of sexual sin which would bring discredit upon our Lord, defile our bodies and ruin our testimonies before men. God is not honored with steeples, stained glass windows or beautiful buildings but He is honored by the right use of our bodies. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rom. 12:1).

ROUSING COMMAND 6:18

Flee from sexual immorality. The Greek word here is *pont* which refers to all kinds of sexual immorality. Some sins we fight and some sins we flee. The best preventative to sexual immorality is to flee it. If you are being tempted, don't try to figure it out. Don't talk to someone about it. Don't try to fight it. Flee! Get away from it! This is a command from God, and the present tense, "Be continually fleeing," suggests the strength of this temptation.

Now this may mean as Christians we may have to flee from an actual situation as when Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife who propositioned him. However, this more than likely means for us to flee situations which will stimulate us towards this kind of action. If you are in a

parked car and you find yourself being aroused, get out of there pronto. If you are reading a magazine that has smutty material, put it down immediately. If you are watching television and something flashes on the screen which causes you to lust, get up and leave the room or turn off the television set. If you have a secretary who is attractive to you, avoid situations which could lead to an affair. Most of the fleeing we will do is mental fleeing because all sexual stimulation begins in the mind, and the mind is where we fight the battles.

I have a friend whose wife works in a clinic to help young girls who get pregnant so as to encourage them not to abort their babies. Many of these girls are not Christians but some are. It is interesting that they have about twenty-five Christian girls a year who swear they are virgins get pregnant. These girls are doing everything short of having actual intercourse not understanding that male sperm can crawl. My point is there are many Christian kids who claim to be virgins who are involved in all kinds of hanky-panky short of sexual intercourse which is sexually immoral.

All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Christians with sensitive consciences have struggled with this verse thinking sexual sin is the worst of all kinds of sin. It does not seem that this verse teaches that fornication is the most serious and greatest of all sins. What it does imply is that sexual sin is unique. There is no other sin quite like it. Sexual sin is a sin against the body. When one engages in illicit sex, he or she is defiling the body to use it for a purpose other than that for which God made it—to house the person of God, to be intimately related to the greatness and the majesty of God. The sin of illicit sex is ruinous to both body and soul. Sex is a physical act, and emotional act and a spiritual act and to indulge in it outside of marriage is dangerous to one's mental, emotional and spiritual health, and with this sin comes enormous guilt. Some think that the sin against the body may refer to sexually transmitted diseases since wanton sex does bring all kinds of venereal diseases with it. Whatever, we know the premarital and extra-marital sex bring hurt to both body and soul, and this is especially true when Christians engage in the act.

CONCLUSION

We might get the idea from the chapter that God is against sex, but nothing could be farther from the truth. God is for sex in the marriage union, and when we get to chapter seven, we will see how God designed sex for marriage and the joy sex brings when we are using our bodies the way God originally designed. Playboy Magazine says, "Sex within any context"; the New Morality says, "Sex within a love context"; Christianity says; "Sex within the marriage context." As Christians we must insist on this Biblical ethic.

The Bible teaches God forgives sinners. If you are hung up sexually or have a mind possessed with sexual fantasies, God will forgive you. God loves to take sinful people and give them new hearts and new starts. But He only forgives those who turn to Jesus Christ by faith

and receive Him as Savior. He only gives a new heart and new life to those who change their minds about sin and sinfulness and bow to Christ as Lord. God is merciful and full of compassion and wants to forgive any sinner who responds to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. Our Lord's words to the woman caught in adultery are so appropriate here: "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (Jn. 8:11). But in the next verse Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). Jesus takes those who walk in the deepest darkness of sin and gives them a new heart and a new start causing them to walk in His light.