

A Study of First Corinthians

Week Five

1 Corinthians 6:7-7:14

Day One

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. 9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

v. 7 – I alluded to this attitude in the last study. A brother had done me wrong and man y told me I could take legal recourse. I chose not to do so. What dishonor that would have brought on Jesus’ body! Since we had no one who could arbitrate, then I chose to suffer loss, trusting God to restore what I had lost. Shortly after I made that decision, I was praying one morning and sensed this question that God was posing: “John, do you want me to vindicate you or would you rather ministry opportunities?” I knew I had only one choice and I immediately knew what the choice would be: I would choose the opportunities (although the vindication was tempting!).

The next day I had the idea for the Bible study that I am writing today, that I have been writing for almost five years! I’m glad I chose to trust God and not take matters into my own hands. Can you apply this principle any place in your own life at this point in time?

v. 8 – The other reason I didn’t press my case was that I need God’s mercy. If I want God to judge others, then He will also judge me. And who can stand before God when He does that? So I know I have wronged others, although I am not aware of who they may be, but I’m sure I have. God has shown me mercy, so I want and need to show others mercy. **We don’t have room to include the quote, but I am thinking here of Jesus’ story of the man who was forgiven a great debt but refused to forgive someone who owed him a much smaller debt (see Matthew 18:23-35). You may want to read that and apply it to this particular verse. What did you learn from doing that?**

vs. 9&10 – This is an interesting list of sins. It starts out with what I would consider gross sins, but it includes what I would consider to be lesser sins. Yet Paul’s teaching is clear—no matter what sin someone “practices,” they will not inherit God’s kingdom (now or in the future) if they persist in maintaining their sinful lifestyle.

Do you see that slander is included in the list, not just sexual immorality? Is there any sin you are tolerating in your life, thinking it isn’t that big of a deal? If there is, then you have some work to do and that work starts with repentance. Sin is a big deal for, as we

learned last study, only a little leaven is required to affect the entire loaf. The same is true for sin. So deal with any issues you may have and do it diligently.

Day Two

11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 12 "Everything is permissible for me"-but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"-but I will not be mastered by anything. 13 "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"-but God will destroy them both. The body 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.

v. 11 – Paul reminded the Corinthians of their sinful past, saying that the Corinthians were (past tense) engaged in the sins he had outlined in the previous verse. But for them to walk now and inherit later God’s kingdom, they had to abandon those sinful practice and live righteously. You also had a past before you knew Jesus. Oscar Wilde once said, “Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future.” That’s a good motto to remember.

Paul said the Spirit in the name of the Lord Jesus first washes each sinner (sets them free from their past), sanctifies them (sets them apart for God’s purpose for their life) and justifies (sets them free from God’s judgment so they can stand before God just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned). That is what God did for you and that is what he can do for the vilest sinner who are engaged in activities listed in verse 10. Do you see people as products for God’s redemption or targets for God’s judgment? How you see them determines how you will relate to them.

v. 12 – This verse is a little tricky to understand just how it fits into what Paul was teaching. I must remember that Paul was responding to a letter from the Corinthians and they probably raised the issue of whether or not the sins to which Paul had referred were really that harmful or even unlawful, from a Jewish point of view. Remember, these people had no spiritual heritage that included God’s word. They were heathens and Paul had to take his heritage, the outpouring of the Spirit and merge the two into his work among the Gentiles. That is why I admire him so much. He was in many ways a creative yet practical theologian.

v. 13 – The Gentiles were engaged in kinds of sexual immorality that wasn’t specifically mentioned or outlawed. Paul is trying to get them to understand a higher principle, that sin enslaves people and the only thing that should consume people and their wills is the will of God, not the will of any flesh. Paul sounds a little like a Greek philosopher to me at this point, and that was his target audience. So he argued from a logical point of view that sin and eating sacrifices offered to idols violated the spirit of the Spirit that was given in Christ’s name.

Years ago I went from a tour of Israel to a tour of Athens and I felt some of what Paul felt. We left the pinnacle of Christian Jewish history, Jerusalem, to the pinnacle of

ancient Greek philosophy and life. It was a tremendous letdown to do that. As I felt that, I thought, “This is what Paul did. He left Jerusalem and Judaism to go to Athens and other places like it to spread the gospel. But he couldn’t just do that. He then had to stay involved to help the new believers build a new society and culture in the midst of Greek and Roman paganism.” My respect for Paul increased all the more as I had those thoughts. **What are you doing not only to help spread the gospel but also to help it take root and grow in the lives of other people and cultures?**

v. 14 – Paul made a simple but profound statement. God has the power to raise us from the dead just like He did Jesus. Because of that fact, we can live in a new society with a new power source for victorious sinless living. We can live in the power of the Spirit who raises the dead back to life. Hallelujah!

Day Three

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 he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

vs. 15&16 – I have visited the ruins at Corinth on two occasions. Corinth was a corrupt city, as we have noted previously. Due to its location, there were always a lot of sailors and travelers in the city. Many believe that there was a temple on the high point overlooking the city. This temple housed many prostitutes who were working their trade as part of their religious duty to their temple goddess.

I would think that the local residents were also involved in this “religious” practice so that prostitution was an accepted norm in Corinth. So now Paul had to address something that was certainly known in Israel, but not to this extent I’m sure. Notice that Paul didn’t simply tell them not to fornicate; he gave them a picture of what they were doing if they did indeed engage the services of a prostitute. They were taking themselves, part of Jesus’ body, and joining that body to the body of a temple prostitute. In my mind, this is a more effective way to educate the Corinthians than to simply say, “Don’t do it!”

The church has been effective at declaring, “Don’t do it!” But can you come up with better ways to tell the same story? If you are teaching, can you do what Paul did, and appeal to the positive – “You are part of Christ’s body” – rather than the negative – “It’s sin and it stinks. Stop it!”

v. 17 – Paul pointed out that there is a spiritual aspect to sexual union—it’s not just a joining of bodies. And of course being joined to the Lord and His body is also a spiritual experience. So Paul, again sounding like a good philosopher, argued that it was illogical and irrational to join yourself to the Lord and then to a prostitute.

v. 18 – Then Paul gave them the “don’t do it.” But I love his use of words. He urged the Corinthians to flee, to run from sexual impurity. It was a “step down” from the reality of their union with Jesus. I love Paul! There was no topic that was off limits to him if he could help his converts follow Jesus more effectively as they lived their daily lives. There is no sense that this topic was trivial or below his lofty theological mind. He knew that if the Corinthians’ faith didn’t change the way they lived, then their faith was useless.

I want to be a practical Christian, don’t you? I also want to be a practical teacher and writer. I want to help people live their lives more effectively, in a manner that is more pleasing to the Lord. That is the legacy that Paul left us and it is something I’m afraid the modern church must work to recapture. **Do you agree with me or not? If not, why not?**

Day Four

19 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; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 7:1 Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. 2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

vs. 19&20 – These verses have been quoted to many smokers who were urged not to ingest tobacco smoke into their lungs and systems. I suppose that is an appropriate application for them, but of course the context here is sexual immorality. Paul urged his readers not to take a holy thing (their body) and unite it with something or someone unholy (a prostitute).

There were many Greeks who believed that the body was so insignificant that it didn’t matter what one did—the flesh amounted to nothing. I’m sure that there were some Corinthians who had this old mindset. Today, Paul would probably write to those who felt they could just get forgiveness no matter what sin they committed, thus their lukewarm commitment to holiness. **Can you think of any other application or insight where these verses are concerned?**

Since God created our body and now inhabits it as well, Paul urged us to honor God with our bodies. We should treat them well and take care of them; if God was interested enough to create them, we should be interested enough to keep them in good working order. **Do you think this pertains to exercise and health? What we eat? How far do we take this principle? How can or do you apply it in your own life?**

v. 1 – Once again you see that Paul was answering a letter when he wrote this one, so we aren’t always sure what issue he was addressing or question he was answering. Here there must have been a question about marrying in the current state of the world and church. Paul responded that it is good not to marry, but went to say that it is preferable to immorality.

I must admit that I have some reservations as we enter this portion of Paul's letter. I was raised Catholic, and I remember how much of this was used to develop the mindset that a life as a priest, nun or monk was superior spiritually to a married life. Many people I knew "bought" into that thinking, including me. That is what in part led me to study in the seminary to be a priest. It became clear to me early on, however, that I did not have the "gift" of celibacy, so I left to study economics. If the issue of singleness had not been a condition, I think I would have stayed and finished my studies. I knew I wanted to serve God in the ministry; I just knew that I needed a wife.

v. 2 – I think that Paul's advice would be the same today. There is so much immorality (of the potential for it) that it is far better that each man and woman look to marry, especially if they have trouble controlling their sexual desires. Yet, Paul was not saying here that the only reason to marry is for sexual reasons—but that is an important reason.

Day Five

3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7 I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

v. 3 – Suddenly Paul got very practical, giving out marital advice. The marital duty he referred to here is sexual relations. The great apostle, who had insight into the mysteries of God, now becomes a local pastor and counsels married couples not to withhold intimate relations from one another. Was this a problem? Was this mentioned as an issue raised in the letter that the church sent to Paul?

Those answers aren't clear from the context, but Paul was concerned about the issue of sexual immorality that was prevalent in Corinth and throughout the Greek world. With that in mind, Paul saw the simplicity of God's plan to combat that immorality, and the answer was (and is) marriage.

v. 4 – So much of this is common knowledge for us who have some "history" and background in the faith, but Paul was breaking new ground. He was educating converts who had absolutely no history in the morality of Judaism and had to teach basic principles that were second-nature to him. This is the beauty of Paul's work to me. Paul had to take things from his past and make them relevant and understandable to a whole new culture. He truly was a great missionary and fulfilled this comment that Jesus made:

He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (Matthew 13:52).

Paul's new treasure was his work among the Gentiles, establishing centers of righteousness, using his background as a Pharisee as the foundation for his teaching. I *love* this man! He was a creative genius, yet he used unchanging principles as the basis for his creativity. No topic was too trivial or too common for his work.

Many church men shy away from such work, including me, preferring to work with those who have a better understanding of the principles, or with those who at least appear to be "holier." Not Paul! He worked with people where they were, not where he wanted them to be spiritually and morally.

v. 5 – Paul reminded married couples that they didn't have total ownership over their bodies; it was a joint venture as each partner had some claim or share of the other's. He urged them, therefore, not to "play games" with sex, depriving one another as a means to control the other. The only basis for a stoppage of physical relations was where both parties agreed, and so both parties could devote themselves to prayer. I guess he was referring to a sex fast, just like there is a food fast. But just like the food fast, the sex fast should have a spiritual basis, and not one that was not used in any way to deprive or punish the marriage partner. Sex isn't a privilege that the partner bestows on the other; it is a right. If you are married, are you or your partner using sex in any way as a reward or punishment to obtain some behavior from your partner that you want?

vs. 6&7 – Paul was single and happy in his work. He wished that everyone would be like him, able to control their sexual appetites. But he recognized they were not. Oh, how I wish my former church could "get" this. Could the most recent scandals of priests misdeeds with young children have been avoided if that church had been more realistic, more in tune with what Paul taught? I think so! I am not justifying or rationalizing anything those men did. It seems to me, however, that making celibacy a condition for ministry is absolutely wrong and leads to all kinds of problems! To cause anyone to deny their sexuality in order to preach is absurd! **Do you agree with me? If not, feel free to write and share your insight with me.**

Day Six

8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. 9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

v. 8 – It seems like there were a lot of widows in Paul's era. I suppose the life expectancy wasn't that long, especially for men. The early church made it a point of emphasis to care for the widows. Keep in mind, there were no government relief

programs such as many Western nations have to provide some means of support for the destitute and poor. The church saw a “niche” where they could apply the principles of Jesus to help the poor and they did it with gusto. **What are you doing for the poor?** A few years ago, I felt impressed that I wasn’t doing enough administrative stuff that benefited the poor. I have tried to make adjustments to that some of my work here in the States and Africa benefits those who cannot pay for my services. It’s not easy at times, but I sense that is pleasing to the Lord. There is more to do for the poor than giving money.

v. 9 – Paul taught that it is better not to marry, but if that isn’t possible, then it is better to marry than to struggle with sexual purity. Practical advice, wouldn’t you say? The church should emphasize this today as well, as I stated previously. Today it is socially acceptable to live together in many circles, so people don’t have to either marry or “burn with passion.” Times have changed but people have not since Paul wrote this letter.

v. 10 – I think this is the most fascinating insert that Paul made here. He made sure that the reader knew what he was writing was a directive from God. What confidence! What faith! To write and know what he was writing was something that God wanted the readers to know. Yet there is something else that impresses me here. Paul in a few verses will state his opinion and he wanted to distinguish his opinions from the word of the Lord!

I try to do this when I teach as well. I will say, “I have a theory,” or “This is my opinion,” or “I’m not sure about this, so you judge it for yourself.” I think too many present everything they teach as “from the Lord” and I don’t believe that to be true. I think we all have opinions and theories and that’s good. It is inappropriate and misrepresents God to position them all as a word from the Lord. Paul was clear to make a distinction between what was his and what was God’s.

v. 11 – From the limited research I have done, divorce was easy to obtain and common in Paul’s world. After Paul instructed the singles, he then went back to instructing those who were married. He had urged them not to deprive one another of their conjugal rights, then he addressed the issue of divorce. He made it clear that divorce wasn’t an option like it was for the other Gentiles.

I wonder if the modern church needs to return to this message. Statistics show that the divorce rate is the same for Christians as non-Christians. I wonder if we don’t need to same the same message that Paul gave earlier in this letter to those who were suing and being sued: Better to be wronged than to go to court to address your grievances. **Unless there is abuse, I wonder if some couples shouldn’t suffer rather than divorce? I wonder if the church should tell them that? What do you think? Am I being too hard?**

Day Seven

12 To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

vs. 12&13 – Paul had the boldness and wisdom to insert his own opinion and identify it as such. I am so impressed with that. Of course, Paul’s opinion would carry a lot of weight based on his background, experience and relationship to the Corinthians. It would have been easy for the Corinthians to receive his opinion as a word from the Lord. Paul was careful, however, to point out this advice as just that—his advice.

How did Paul know, however, the distinction between his opinion and the word of the Lord? Since he was writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, how was he able to distinguish between one thing—“this is from the Lord”—and another thing—“this is from me.”

There are times when I have said, “God spoke to me.” There are other times I’ve said, “I think this is true.” Do you make that distinction when you speak or teach? I’ve heard many say, “The Lord told me this and that,” but it sounded suspiciously like them. We must learn to know the difference and help people make the distinction as well.

The issue here was something that would help preserve marriages that were “complicated” by one partner coming to the Lord while the other did not. Paul urged that the partners stay together in that situation as long as the unbeliever agreed to do so.

v. 14 – I have always been intrigued by Paul’s perspective on the children of these “mixed marriages.” We must remember that Paul was a Jew by birth and training and he was certainly going to bring that to bear on his decisions and teaching. Let’s read what one commentary had to say about this verse:

The Jews considered a child as born out of holiness whose parents were not proselytes at the time of the birth, though afterward they became proselytes. On the other hand, they considered the children of heathens born in holiness, provided the parents became proselytes before the birth. All the children of the pagans were reputed unclean by the Jews; and all their own children holy. This shows clearly what the apostle's meaning is. (from Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Since one of the parents were believers, that made their children “holy” – set apart as special in the sight of God.