

Sex in the city – 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

22nd August 2010 @ 6:30pm

Introduction

Good evening. This week I went to Dorset for a few days. Fiona and I had a great time staying at a small country house hotel that we both really like.

But to be honest all I was thinking about was sex. I couldn't get it out of my mind! While I was doing some research for Cafélife in a Sherborne coffee-shop, I was thinking about sex.

While I was sitting down in a ladies clothes shop, as Fiona tried on a dress for a wedding we're going to next month, I was thinking about sex.

While we were driving through the beautiful Dorset country-side, I was thinking about sex.

Sex, sex, sex, that's all I could think about.... and I'm a Church of England clergyman!

And it went on! Yesterday I was in Lewes chatting to a young shop assistant in another coffee-shop – doing some more research for Cafélife, the expenses claims will be coming in shortly, Steve – anyway the shop assistant asked me what I was going to be doing for the rest of the day.

I told her that I would be thinking about sex: sex, sex, and more sex. It's absolutely true; that's exactly what I said!

Then I went on to tell her that the reason I was thinking about sex was because of the sermon that I was preparing for tonight.

I told her that I would be preaching an unpopular message: sex is reserved solely for marriage. It's great in it. But it's rubbish outside it.

"Oh that's interesting", she said. "I'm not at all religious but it's good to hear different views about things like that." And we started talking about God's view of sex.

It just shows that gospel opportunities can turn up at any time.

Anyway, in case you haven't quite got it yet, this evening I'm going to talk about just one thing: sex.

I'm going to talk about it from two viewpoints: Firstly the distorted view of sex held by the Corinthians, and secondly, God's view of sex held by Paul.

Got that: the Corinthian view of sex then God's view of sex!

The Corinthian view of sex

As a society we're saturated by sex. We have it coming out of our ears! Well not really..

But although we might think that this is a modern happening – it isn't.

Flooding a society with sex hasn't just been done in the last half-century. No, not at all!

To a greater or lesser extent, societies have been saturated by sex since ancient times!

And as we've found out over these last few weeks, the Corinthians, in particular, were world champions at it! There's a good reason why I called this talk 'Sex in the city'!

Two weeks ago, Steve told us about an example of incest that was going on in the congregation. This week we're looking at having sex with prostitutes.

Corinth was dominated by the 'Acrocorinth'. This was a hill over 600 metres high, on which stood a large temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love.

This cult was dedicated to the glorification of sex. And as each evening fell, 1,000 priestesses from the temple, who were basically sacred prostitutes, came down into the city and plied their trade in the streets.

Imagine the equivalent in today's world. Brighton train station in the early evening with 1,000 prostitutes arriving on a train from London.

That would certainly be a lad's night out with a difference!

Living in the centre of this hotbed of sexual immorality, the Corinthian church had become totally confused about the whole business of sex. And it seems that some of their men were in the habit of sleeping with prostitutes.

As a result they'd developed a really distorted, and low, view of sex.

They were saying things like:

- We can have sex with whoever we want (v12)
- Sex is simply an urge to be satisfied whenever we feel like it (v13)

Let's go through these views in turn

1. *"Everything is permissible for me" (v12)*

Firstly, the Corinthians argued: "Everything is permissible for me" (v12)

They were thinking:

Hey it's a free country!

Look, if there's two consenting adults, no children, no rape, no abuse, and two consenting adults wanting to have sex, what's wrong with that?

It's not against the law.

My family and friends don't have a problem with it.

I know many others who have consensual casual sex.

What's the problem?

In reply, Paul says just because something's legal doesn't mean it's moral.

Just because the government accepts it, doesn't mean God accepts it.

And just because society doesn't have a problem with it, doesn't mean that God's kingdom doesn't have a problem with it.

The Corinthians think they're living a life of freedom, but Paul says:

"You're not free, because you're having sex. In fact you're out of control.

You're mastered and enslaved by it.

Those of you who are porn addicts, you're not free.
Those of you who can't stop sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend, you're not free.
Those of you who can't stop going from one troubled relationship to another, you're not free.
You're stuck in the rut of sin—a habitual pattern that'll eventually lead to death if not dealt with
Although you might think you're free – you're not!
After all, those who are free have self-control. Those who are free can say “no.” You can't!

Paul says that as Christian we're to live by God's standards.
Not everything is good for us.
And we're not to be mastered by anything or anyone other than God

2. *Sex is simply an urge to be satisfied whenever we feel like it*
So the low view of sex is firstly that there are no limits or boundaries
Secondly, it's that sex is simply a natural urge that needs to be satisfied

The Corinthian argument goes something like this:
Sex is just a natural biological function.
If I'm hungry, I eat. If I'm thirsty, I drink.
Similarly when I've got sexual needs, when I've got the urge, I'll just go and have some sex.
Having sex is natural; denial isn't
So, whenever I feel the urge, I should go and relieve it by having sex.
After all, the truth is that we're just highly evolved animals – and that's all we are

No, we're not, says Paul.
We're not just animals – we're the image-bearers of God!
And as image-bearers of God, we have dignity, value and worth
As humans we're made up of a body and a soul, and when we have sex we're connecting not only with our bodies but with our souls too.
That's what one-flesh really means. It's total union.

Paul says that if we have inappropriate sex, it'll damage, wound, and scar our souls
We'll damage a sacred part of our humanity
Sex isn't just two bodies coming together to satisfy a natural urge – it's something so much more

Paul is taking on some of the Corinthian church's sayings and exposing them for the half-truths that they are.

In verse 9, Paul says, “Do not be deceived”—but some Christians today, I'm afraid, are deceived. Just like the Corinthians they say, “I'm a Christian. I've been saved by grace, so I can do anything I want and I'll still go to heaven”

But in verse 10 Paul says you may not be a Christian if you practice a life of habitual unrepentant sin.

What Paul's saying is this: if you're a real Christian, you'll experience life change. You'll start bearing different fruit.

Fiona and I have got an apple tree in our garden. How do we know that? Well, right now it's got apples on it!

How do you know if someone's a Christian? It's because they live a holy life. They are repentant of their sin.

They've been changed.

They've been transformed.

They've been disinfected and renewed through the blood of Jesus dying on the cross for them.

So if you're here this evening and you haven't seen any life-change since you became a Christian, you must ask yourself, "Am I self-deceived? Do I really know Jesus?"

If this is you, please speak to one of us after the service and make sure of your eternal destiny

So we've seen the low view of sex: the Corinthian view. Now what about the high view of sex – God's view?

The high view of sex – God's view

The high view of sex is simply this: sex is an amazing gift from God that needs to be handled with reverence and care.

In complete contrast to the Corinthians' false view of freedom and their false view of the body, Paul argues in two ways.

Firstly, that sex is the ultimate expression of commitment between two married people

And secondly, he argues that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

He says that as Christians we've been bought by God in a divine purchase and so we don't have the freedom to do whatever we want with our bodies.

Let's have a look at this in a bit more detail

Firstly, sex is the ultimate expression of commitment between two married people

In verses 13 to 17 Paul argues that our bodies are meant for Jesus.

We're created to honour him with our whole person, including our bodies – not just our souls and spirits

In fact, he says, Jesus died precisely so that he could raise our bodies – physically. (v14) Philippians even tells us that when our bodies are recreated they'll be like Jesus' resurrected body (Phil 3:21 + 1 Cor. 15:42-44)

So, Paul continues, don't try to tell me that the body doesn't matter. It does.

As Christians, our union with Jesus is total.

Our whole person, our very personhood, if you like, is united with Christ, body and spirit

So when you're having sex with a prostitute you're uniting Christ to that prostitute

That's what Paul is saying in verses 15 to 17
It's incredible stuff

The key to Paul's argument is the term "one flesh" in verse 16
Paul is saying that when sex takes place, much more than 'just' a physical union takes place.
He's saying that a personal transformation happens
He's saying that sex in any circumstances, including with a prostitute, is designed to do this

Paul is saying that the sexual act is one of self-commitment which deeply involves the entire person. Not just body parts.
Sex is the full giving of one's entire self to the one to whom we belong
So sex is the ultimate expression of commitment between two married people
And you can't get a higher view of sex than that!

In verses 19 and 20, Paul builds on this by saying that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

He reminds us that as Christians we've been bought by God in a divine purchase and therefore we don't have the freedom to do whatever we want with our bodies.

Our bodies are holy places. They're not playgrounds.
Just as we would think twice of skateboarding through a cathedral, we shouldn't treat our bodies like a cheap toy.
Or indeed treat anybody else's body like that – girlfriends aren't simply like a boy's toy to be recycled on e-bay when they're no longer wanted.

So how should we treat God's temple?

Well the first thing is that we're to bring honour to him with our bodies
Our bodies aren't bad because they're sexual!
God designed and created our sexual kit exactly as he wanted to – there are plenty of other ways he could have done it
Secondly, sexual urges are entirely normal and God-made
But unlike the Corinthians' view, God's intention is that they drive you to marriage, not to a cheap thrill
So thirdly, we're to honour God by abstaining from sex outside marriage
Wait. Just wait.
It's good. It's possible. It honours God.
Virginity isn't a dirty word!

Being a virgin when you marry is one of the most creative, releasing, purifying and beautiful gifts that can be brought to Christian marriage.
Mark Driscoll, the pastor of a huge church in America, says that having sex before marriage is the one thing he regrets most in his whole life.
I know that there's a man who worships with us at Southover who feels very similarly. And I suspect that there's quite a few others that I don't know about.

This passage is telling us that in some way a person's whole personhood is spoilt when they have sex outside marriage.

(Although I do want everyone to realise that nothing is ultimately beyond the power of Christ's love for us. Thanks to the saving power of Jesus, who can make all things new – even our biggest, baddest, sexual mess is redeemable if we go to Jesus for help.)

But the point is this: if we're cheating sexually, we're cheating on our relationship with Christ

We're being an unfaithful bride to him.

That's why we have to take this sin so seriously.

Although sins themselves may be equal, their consequences are not.

The truth is that the consequences of sexual sin are more damaging than almost any other sin.

If you know a Christian who's sleeping with their boyfriend or girlfriend, ask them how their prayer life is going?

Ask them about their personal Bible study: Are they able to hear God when they read it?

How about their church attendance?

How's their desire to worship God?

How's their witnessing for Jesus Christ?

The problem with sexual sin is that it strikes at the very heart of our walk with God

We just can't separate what we do with our bodies, from what we experience in our hearts

That's why in verse 18 we're to flee sexual immorality!

We're not to negotiate – If you just let me continue have sex with my boyfriend/ girlfriend/ partner I'll do whatever else you want me to God. Just don't ask me to give up this one little thing

We're not to plead – Can't I carry on doing it just a little bit longer? Just so I can get things sorted out between us...

No! Paul is very clear

This is one sin we're told not to resist.

We don't have the strength to resist.

We're to be first class cowards when it comes to sexual temptation.

We're to run – not walk from sexual sin!

Remember those Indiana Jones films.

He always seems to be running for his life – actually that's because he is running for his life.

If those baddies catch him – he's had it!

He runs as if his very life depends on it – because his life does depend on it!

We must do the same – our life might very well depend on it.

Joseph in the Old Testament is a great example for us here.

In Genesis 39, he ran from Potiphar's wife when she wanted to have sex with him

It's okay for men as well as women to say no to illicit sex

We're to flee from sexual immorality with every fibre of our being
Some of us need to change computer habits
Some will need to change what they watch on TV or read in magazines
Others need to seek out an accountability partner who can keep them honest
I'm sure that you know where you need disinfecting

We must know our limits and stay well back from the edge. If we dance too close to the edge, we'll eventually fall

Conclusion

So let's recap

We've been talking about the idea that judges all the rest of Christian sexual ethics
It answers all the questions

Why shouldn't people sleep with animals?

Why is adultery wrong?

Why are homosexual practices wrong?

Why is pre-marital sex wrong?

Answer: simply because there is no true oneness and so there should be no one-flesh either
That's what Paul is arguing here.

The relevance for us is not that some Corinthian Christian was sleeping with a prostitute;
Paul could just as easily have said,
"He who has sex with the good-looking house-wife just down the street" or
"She who has sex with the good-looking athlete down the stairs".

The relevance for us is that like the Corinthians we live in an overly sexualized culture.
And let's not kid ourselves, even Southover Church contains the infection and unhealthiness
of sexual sin.

What's needed is the strong disinfectant that only a life changed by Jesus can bring

The low view of sex says:

There's nothing special about it – sex is simply a commodity

As long as no one is hurt, there are no limits and no boundaries

God's view of sex is very different. It says:

Humans are image-bearers of me

Sex is very special – it's a wonderful gift from me to you

It's to be reserved exclusively for marriage

And oh yes, there are limits. Mess up and you will damage both body and soul, perhaps
eternally

So, you're to flee from sexual immorality with every fibre of your being

The message tonight is very simple and very clear:

Since we're to choose what honours God in our body, we're to save sex for marriage.

We're to be celibate except with our spouse

Period

End of story
End of unpopular message
End of me talking about sex
End of sermon