

INI

1 Corinthians 6,9-20

Trinity 8 2014 — 26 July 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the first lesson from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, which was read earlier:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the Kingdom of God. ... Flee sexual immorality. ... Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: We live in a pretty permissive part of the United States as far as all sorts of sexual relationships are concerned. What was unthinkable a decade or two ago, now is the law of the land.

The question before us this morning is what does God have to say about this, and more importantly, why does He say it? As an aside, we should not for one second be fooled into thinking that when Paul wrote the situation he was facing in dealing with sexuality in a permissive, pagan society was all that much different from the one facing us today. The examples I'm using contain some pretty graphic language, but this is

to make clear that Paul faced many of the situations we would encounter today.

This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “Don’t Be Deceived – Our Bodies Are Temples Of The Holy Spirit.” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) In Matters Of Sex, The World Would Deceive Us**
- 2) Flee Sexual Immorality;** and,
- 3) What It Means To Be The Temple Of The Holy Spirit**

1) In Matters Of Sex, The World Would Deceive Us. And in reaction to the pagan society around him, it is no surprise that Paul tells his readers, “Don’t be deceived.” I imagine he tells his readers not to be deceived because in fact they have been deceived. Some how they have come to the conclusion that they can continue to act as wicked or unregenerate people – just a fancy word for unbelievers.

Paul names several categories of behavior that if continued to be practiced will exclude a person from the Kingdom of God. This morning, though, I want to focus on those behaviors that have to do with sexual relationships. Paul denounces homosexuality, adultery, and fornication or prostitution.

In the ancient world, what sort of situation would Paul have been confronting? For this I have found a book by Sarah Ruden to be most helpful. She is a Classicist and has written *Paul Among The People: The Apostle Reinterpreted And Reimagined In His Own Time* (Pantheon Books, 2010).

Ruden points out that it goes without saying that Jewish teaching was that homosexual acts were an abomination. However, homosexuality was degrading even in pagan culture. Paul speaks about both the dominant and feminine partner in homosexual relationships. Ruden writes – and by the way, some of this is graphic:

The Roman poet Martial uses “to cut to pieces” as the ordinary term for “to be the passive partner.” The Greeks and Romans thought that the active partner in homosexual intercourse used, humiliated, and physically and morally damaged the passive one. ... homosexual penetration could be harmless nowhere. There were no gay households; there were in fact no gay institutions or gay culture at all, in the sense of times and places where it was safe for men to have anal sex with one another.

In fifth-century Athens (the gay paradise we hear of), one of the most common insults in comedy was “having a loose anus,” meaning depraved – not just sexually, but generally. (Ruden, 49)

Ruden goes on to make her case by citing one classical author after another, and the picture is one of violence and degradation.

In the first chapter of his Letter to the Romans, Paul also condemns homosexuality, and there he said

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. (Romans 1,18)

And in our text for today, Paul speaks about “the unrighteous.” Ruden points out that for those fluent in Greek the word in Paul’s day could be understood as “injustice.” “There is nothing vague about it. It is about hurting people. Paul pairs the word with “ungodliness” (more precisely, “failure in worship”), but he repeats “wickedness” [or “unrighteousness”]. Hurting people shows how much contempt you have for God” (Ruden, 69).

God, speaking through Paul, condemns all homosexual activity.

God also goes on to condemn fornication and or prostitution. Here we are not speaking about adultery, which had its own word in Greek and even in the Roman world was condemned. As Ruden says,

There was no sympathy for adulterers, no notion of ‘tragic lovers,’ no excuse that ‘people fall in love.’ ... Falling in love was thought to be a shameful misfortune, a kind of insanity, and decent people were not supposed to let such emotions have any influence of the course of their lives. (Ruden, 13)

As Ruden points out, “fornication” might be the wrong word to use here; “prostitution” or “whoring” is what Paul is getting at, even if there is no payment for service involved. The Greeks and Romans looked down on a woman who had more than one sexual partner. Not so for men, as long as a few rules were followed, the ban on adultery being one of them. But what is amazing in Paul is that he condemns both – both the unfaithful man as well as the unfaithful woman. Paul gives no free pass or proposes a double standard for the man.

It seems that according to Ruden Paul is really a pretty up-to-date fellow in commenting on the varieties of sexual relations, hetero, homo, you name it.

What does the world today say?

Thank you Justice Kennedy for telling us that all have the right to marry – man and woman, man and man, woman and woman, and who knows what else.

Ashley Madison is a web site that promotes adultery – and has 37 million plus customers. It made the news because it wanted to charge people for deleting their information but hackers threatened to make everything public for free. Well, we all should know that there is no such thing as “secrecy” or even “privacy” on the web.

As far as fornication is concerned, casual sex barely rates a mention on the morality scale.

To all this Paul tells his readers as well as us to

2) Flee Sexual Immorality! When Paul speaks about fleeing sexual immorality he is speaking about fleeing those situations and occasions when one might be tempted to engage in sexual immorality. After all, Paul speaks that some of those to whom he was writing had once engaged in these kinds of activities – but now one should flee rather than continue.

Why flee? Well, to continue in these practices means losing the faith, as the Formula of Concord makes clear:

Therefore we must begin by earnestly criticizing and rejecting the false Epicurean delusion which some dream up that it is impossible to lose faith and the gift of righteousness and salvation, once it has been received, through any sin, even a wanton and deliberate one, or through wicked works; and that even though a Christian follows his evil lusts without fear and shame, resists the Holy Spirit, and deliberately proceeds to sin against his conscience, he can nevertheless retain faith, the grace of God, righteousness, and salvation.³² We should often, with all diligence and earnestness, repeat and impress upon Christians who have been justified by faith these true, immutable, and divine threats and earnest punishments and admonitions: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the [sexually] immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers will inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6,9). “Those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Galatians 5,21; Ephesians 5,5). “If you live according to the flesh you will die” (Romans 8,13). “On account of these the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience” (Colossians 3,6). [Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article IV, “Good Works,” § 31-32]

But we should also realize that temptation comes to all of us. Luther speaks of this in the Large Catechism:

To feel temptation, therefore, is quite a different thing from

consenting and yielding to it. We must all feel it, though not all to the same degree; some have more frequent and severe temptations than others. Youth, for example, are tempted chiefly by the flesh; older people are tempted by the world. Others, who are concerned with spiritual matters (that is, strong Christians) are tempted by the devil. But we cannot be harmed by the mere feeling of temptation as long as it is contrary to our will and we would prefer to be rid of it. If we do not feel it, it could not be called a temptation. But to consent to it is to give it free rein and neither resist it nor pray for help against it. (Luther, Large Catechism, III, § 107-08)

This applies to all who feel any kind of sexual temptation. It is no sin to be tempted; it is a sin to give in to the temptation.

As a matter of fact, Paul has to urge his readers to flee because they have misinterpreted what he previously said or taught and threw it back into his face.

Paul's opponents misinterpreted Paul when they said: "All things are lawful for me" and "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them." Paul spoke about freedom from following the Law in order to gain a right standing with God – he did not speak of freedom from the Law as a guide for Christian Living – what we would call the Third Use of the law. Paul probably spoke about food in the context of Jewish dietary restrictions – it did not matter. But it matters a lot that Christ will raise us up.

Thus, Paul tells us

3) What It Means To Be The Temple Of The Holy Spirit. We have been bought at a price. Christ bought us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil by going to the Cross to pay the price for our sins. Indeed, Jesus redeemed all of us – body, soul, and spirit.

We have been brought in His Kingdom through Holy Baptism and

sustained by Word and sacrament. These are the Means of Grace by which the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts and sustains that faith. Thus, all believers are the Temple of the Holy Spirit because they are also members of the Body of Christ.

Now Paul shows us why sexual sins are so destructive.

In Genesis, God said of Adam and Eve that when they consummated their relationship “the two shall become one flesh.”

Thus, sexual relationships are not mere physical couplings. There is a spiritual dimension that people in the world do not like to speak of or even acknowledge. God has reserved sexual relations to the marriage bed of a man and a woman – the marriage bed is undefiled. All other sexual relationships apart from this join not only the two engaged in intimacy but also join God in immorality. That is faith destroying and faith denying. In God’s eyes, there is no such thing as casual sex. By the way, even in the Corinth of Paul’s day one could go to the temple of Aphrodite and engage temple prostitutes. Some would limit Paul’s discussion of prostitution to only temple prostitution, but it is clear that Paul is speaking all kinds of “whoring.”

Conclusion: Having looked at this from both the classical world and the world of today, I think it safe to say that there is nothing in our world as far as sexual immorality is concerned that would really surprise Paul – or the Corinthians to whom he was writing and seemingly wanted a bit of leeway in sexual activities. But as far as leeway in any kind of sexual activities is concerned, Paul would say – Don’t be deceived – ever! Denial is not a river in Egypt.

Homosexuality, with all of its permutations, were and are an abomination before God. Fornication or prostitution was not to be practiced by either men or women – no double standards. Adultery is condemned out of hand – even the ancients did that; no further discussion need.

Casual sex of whatever kind is faith denying and faith destroying. It joins God with immorality.

But as Paul said, some of his readers had once practiced these things. In Christ, however, they found forgiveness and a new life. The world would tempt them to relapse, but God would keep them in the faith. God would be with them in the struggles of temptation, and that sometimes can be quite a while.

Jesus tells us that through His Cross and resurrection He has redeemed all of us – body, soul, and spirit. The Holy Spirit has made us His temple. Our bodies have been redeemed so that in all things through our bodies we might glorify God. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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