

Sensuality to Servanthood

Choosing Wisely When the Culture Clashes, October 9 & 10 | 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
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SENSUALITY CAUGHT THE CHRISTIANS IN CORINTH

The Acropolis over Corinth dominated the landscape of ancient Corinth.

It's called the Acrocorinth. This is the view of the Acrocorinth today from the ruins of ancient Corinth. It dominates the landscape.

It was partially a fortress and partially a temple complex.

Very little of what existed in ancient Corinth exists now. However, the hill itself tells the story of the Acrocorinth's influence over life below.

The Temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth strongly shaped the city's reputation.

Aphrodite was Corinth's patron goddess.

The Temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth was infamous because it was the only shrine in ancient Greece known to encourage temple prostitution.

There may have been as many as 1,000 male and female prostitutes working in the temple at its height. People from around the world sent slaves to work there.

The rest of the ancient Greek cities looked down on temple prostitution, so Corinth became known as a place of great immorality AND became an important tourist destination.

Human trafficking in the Temple of Aphrodite helped to drive Corinth's economy.

While it's not clear that this custom was still being practiced in Paul's day, what is clear is that those the old ways continued to shape Corinth and the Christians in Corinth.

Sensuality was a major part of life in Corinth.

The pull of the culture shaped the way Christians in Corinth thought about physical intimacy.

Paul challenged them to rethink their positions on this issue.

If you remember, Paul wrote the letter we call 1 Corinthians to help the Christians in Corinth respond to the clash between their culture and their Christian faith in biblical, godly ways.

Frequently that meant changing their minds and actions.

It was one of Four Mental Moves we've discussed so far.

All these moves are about choosing wisely when the culture clashes with our Christian faith.

Now, we come to move 4: To choose wisely when the culture clashes with our Christian faith, we must move from sensuality to servanthood as our guide to intimacy.

What do we mean by sensuality?

The word "sensuality" begins with our senses.

Sensuality means engaging in pleasures that appeal to our senses.

Specifically, sensuality means physical intimacy and sexual activity.

Sensuality implies indulging in inappropriate forms of intimacy.

For the culture in Corinth and in our culture, sensuality was and is the starting point.

Paul calls us to move from sensuality to servanthood as our guide to intimacy. How?

Here are Three Ways to Move from Sensuality to Servanthood as Our Guide to Intimacy:

1. BALANCE CHRISTIAN FREEDOM WITH JESUS' LORDSHIP

The Christians in Corinth embraced three flaws in their thinking. The first came from misunderstanding the true nature of the Gospel. Myth #1: "My freedom is absolute."

Prostitution was common in Greek cities and across the ancient world.

In some places, human trafficking was legal and regulated to keep clients safe.

It was broadly available based on the assumption that sexual activity was simply a bodily function and that not tending to this bodily function would create plenty of social, psychological, and health challenges.

This was the philosophy which the Christians in Corinth grew up with and lived.

That was also the lifestyle they were being drawn back into, so they were eager to defend it.

They asserted the idea that as Christians, they had been freed from the law.

If they were truly free from the demands of the law, they argued, then they were free to do whatever they wanted. It was all lawful, including indulging in any kind of sensuality they chose with whomever they chose.

Sensuality always overly emphasizes freedom.

Sensuality is as prevalent today as it was in Corinth in Paul's day.

Like the people of Corinth in Paul's day, there are those that believe that indulging in various forms of sensuality is a normal, expected part of life and that it's unhealthy to refrain.

Consequently, we find Christians today making arguments similar to the ones that the Christians in Corinth made in Paul's day. They say that Jesus has swept aside the demands the law places on us to live holy lives within boundaries.

They posit that physical intimacy equals love and that Jesus is for love in all its forms.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, Paul challenged us to balance Christian freedom with Jesus' lordship.

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "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. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

Servanthood balances Christian freedom with Jesus' lordship.

Paul's argument starts with what the Christians in Corinth were saying. It's in quotes because it sounds like a slogan, one they borrowed from Paul himself.

The idea that "All things are lawful for me" ape's Paul's teaching that Christ died to set us free from slavery to the law. In **Galatians 5:1** Paul himself wrote,

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Paul meant that we are free from ceremonial laws governing things like what we eat.

He did not say that freedom meant we can do whatever we like without consequences.

Right here in 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, Paul adds that while we can "get away" with doing certain things, it doesn't mean those things are good. They may be terrible for us. They may lead to our being caught in new forms of slavery and addiction.

Freedom in Christ doesn't become a license to do whatever we want.

We are still under the lordship of Jesus.

To make the move from sensuality to servanthood, we must take Jesus' lordship seriously.

What does that mean when it comes to physical intimacy? Paul's teaching leads to a truth:

Truth #1: God makes the rules for intimacy.

We don't make the rules, God does.

We don't get to ignore the rules; the rules still apply.

As servants of God, we pay careful attention to what God says about physical intimacy. His standards become our standards, and as followers of Jesus we follow his standards.

There is forgiveness when we make mistakes and sin. However, that forgiveness does not become a license to engage in any behavior we like.

To move from sensuality to servanthood as our guide for intimacy, we must balance our understanding of Christian freedom with the lordship of Jesus.

2. ACCEPT THE BODY-SOUL CONNECTION

The Corinthian Christians' second mistake came from their culture. Myth #2: "My actions don't matter."

Their view of the nature of human beings came from Plato and other philosophers who distinguished between the body and soul.

It came to be commonly accepted in Greece that our souls contained the essence of who we were; our bodies were merely shells that contained our souls. The soul was released at death to either be with God or to migrate to a new host where it is reincarnated.

The soul was true, good, and eternal. The body was more of a shadow, something that might be evil, and something temporary.

If the soul is where my true self resides, then what I do with my body doesn't matter.

Sensuality usually divides us into pieces.

A sensual approach to life typically hinges on a view that what we do with our bodies doesn't matter; it doesn't impact our souls, at least in a negative way.

This mistake is still the bedrock of how our culture approaches intimacy.

In 1 Corinthians 6:14-20, Paul demanded that we accept the body-soul connection.

And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Servanthood requires that we accept the inherent connection between our soul and body.

Notice that Paul introduced the idea of resurrection here. Jesus was resurrected from the dead. He is a unity of body and soul.

There are two implications. First, like Jesus, we aren't souls with bodies. We are individuals made up of both body and soul or body and spirit.

Second, we are united with Jesus. Because we belong to Jesus, we will be raised from the dead. Also, because we belong to Jesus, what we do touches everything.

This has loads of implications!

It means that sexual activity is spiritual activity. When we are intimate with someone, our bodies and spirits touch.

Plus, when we are intimate with someone, we are bringing Jesus into that relationship.

Truth #2: My actions matter.

What I do with my body matters. It changes me.

Specifically, sexual activity changes me and changes the person I am intimate with.

Further, what I do affects God, and it affects my relationship with God.

To make the move from sensuality to servanthood, I must accept the fact that my body and soul are fused in one complete individual and that (therefore) my actions matter.

3. PRIORITIZE SINGLENESS OR SPOUSE

The Corinthian Christians' third mistake also came from their culture. Myth #3: "My body is mine."

The Christians in Corinth got most of their ideas about marriage, family, and intimacy from the culture around them. How could they not be shaped by their world?

Structurally speaking ancient Greek and Roman marriages were business arrangements. Of course, there were exceptions, and some people were certainly happy.

However, marriages were usually arranged by parents for business and social reasons.

Marriages were business partnerships between two people.

Husbands and wives were intimate to produce children and keep the business thriving.

Therefore, the husband would frequently search out romance through affairs and prostitutes. Wives would sometimes do the same, although they were usually expected to run the household and keep to themselves.

Both partners operated under the basic assumption that their body belonged to them.

Sensuality usually focuses on the self.

Sensuality focuses first and foremost on each one of us taking care of our own needs.

We're free to do whatever makes us happy.

However, our happiness comes first, before the happiness of anyone else.

Beyond that, pursuing intimacy almost becomes a compulsion.

The assumption that intimacy is the only way to be happy and almost a responsibility undermines the very thought that a single person could be happy or complete.

However, in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, Paul commands us to prioritize singleness or our spouse.

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."² But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Fundamentally, servanthood prioritizes others.

First, servanthood prioritizes Jesus over myself. I am obedient to Jesus and to the interests of the Kingdom of God.

In the verses that follow, Paul says that if we value the Kingdom of God and serving Jesus, the best thing to do may be to stay single.

However, if singleness is not our gift, Paul says that getting married and meeting each other's needs in the context of marriage is the right way to express ourselves sexually.

But please understand the picture Paul is painting here. He's not painting a picture of me continuing to treat my body as my own in the context of marriage, nor is he treating marriage as a place to simply get my needs met.

Rather, Paul is saying to us that in marriage we prioritize serving the needs of our spouse.

Truth #3: Our bodies belong to Jesus and our spouses.

Jesus gets to make the biggest decisions about what we do with our bodies, and our spouses have an important role to play as well.

As servants, we prioritize our spouses. We don't hold ourselves back from them.

Please don't misunderstand me. Paul is not giving us a license to harm our spouses.

Paul is simply saying that if you're a husband, meeting your wife's needs should be a top priority. And if you're a wife, meeting your husband's need should be a top priority for you.

Servant love puts the other person first and holds nothing back.

To move from sensuality to servanthood, we must prioritize singleness or our spouses.

SERVANTHOOD EMBRACES THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Paul talked about the wisdom or way of the cross all the way back at the beginning of 1 Corinthians.

The wisdom of the cross is that God chose to save the world through Jesus who though he is God set aside heaven, took on human flesh, lived sinlessly as one of us among us, then allowed us to arrest him and kill him. He bore the full weight of our sin when he died, and his death paid the price for our sin, disobedience, and brokenness.

It's scandalous! The way of the cross has never made sense to non-Christians!

However, the wisdom of the cross is not only the way that God chose to save us. It's the way Jesus lives, and it's the way Jesus expects us to live.

The way of the cross is the wisdom we need for living. Accepting the way of the cross is the real key to moving from sensuality to servanthood as our guide to intimacy which is critical if we are to choose wisely when the culture clashes with our Christian faith.

And our culture does clash with our Christian faith, particularly in the area of intimacy.

Everything we've said today boils down to living the way of the cross ourselves.

To give up any freedom for the lordship of Christ and to say that God makes the rules we will follow for physical intimacy is to choose to pick up our own crosses daily.

To accept that what we do with our bodies impacts our souls, the souls of others, and our relationship with God is to walk the way of the cross.

To choose to prioritize Jesus, singleness, and our spouses over ourselves is to live out the way of the cross in some of the most personal decisions we make.

To choose wisely when our sensual culture clashes with our Christian faith, we must choose the way of the cross. It's the pathway from sensuality to servanthood as our guide for intimacy.

As Jesus experienced, living the way of the cross means dying to ourselves daily.

However, the way of the cross is also the way to life.

Moving from sensuality to servanthood is the road to understanding who we were created to be on a deeper level than the picture our culture offers.

The way of the cross is the path to fulfillment in singleness, happier families, and more fulfilling marriages.

Moving from sensuality to servanthood is the way to a richer relationship with God.

Let's move from sensuality to servanthood as our guide to physical intimacy.