

FOUR REASONS TO PRACTICE CHRISTIAN MORALITY

1 Corinthians 6:1-20

What would you say is the biggest observable difference between those in our area who say they are Christian and those who do not claim to be Christian? I'm sure there are a number of actions that we might discern, but there is one that most would agree on and that is "church attendance." Most who do not claim to be Christian rarely attend church and most who attend churches would claim to be Christians. I think that we would all agree that many things should be observably different for Christians and non-Christians in addition to attending church.

George Barna does a lot of survey work related to religion and he stated that, "In America, most people experience accidental spiritual growth. There is generally no plan or process for maturing spiritually other than showing up at church and absorbing a few ideas. As a result, people do not have a definite understanding of what they are hoping to become as Christ followers."

Barna attributed much of this to the numerous distractions common in most people's lives. He expects to see a widening gap between the intensely committed and those who are casually involved in faith matters. The difference will become strikingly evident between those who make faith the core of their lives and those who simply attach a religious component to an already mature lifestyle. The conclusion is that American Christians "are not as devoted to their faith as they would like to believe. They have positive feelings about the importance of their faith but their faith is rarely the focal point of their life or a critical factor in their decision making. They are spiritually lukewarm and very limited effort is devoted to spiritual growth. Spirituality remains important to people but we are still in a shakeup period where people are trying to discover how to fit it into their increasingly fragmented, busy and changing lives. Some people are seeking to remove God from their life; they are just not sure when and how often they can pencil Him into their schedule. When comparing the lifestyle choices of born again Christians to the national norms, there are more areas of similarity than distinction."

In other words, there are more commonalities than differences between people who profess to be one-kingdom minded and people that have nothing to do with God. There is no difference because people in the church are living lives no different from the way people outside the church live.

This is what was happening 2000 years ago in the church at Corinth. Many of those who professed Christ still had the mind set and practices common to the area in which they lived. Paul addressed several issues that the church needed to show a distinction apart from the world's way of operating. There were some practical reasons for changing their lifestyle. First, was that the world's way was corrupt and by not participating in that system Christians would benefit by avoiding being abused by a corrupt system. An example Paul used was the matter of how disputes were decided.

To Help Your Church 6:1-6

¹ Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? ⁴ So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? ⁵ I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, ⁶ but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? 1 Corinthians 6:1-6 (NASB95)

Just think about it and ask yourself, "Would you trust the decision of a crooked politician

or a judge that accepted bribes more than a panel of mature Christians in your church when you needed help in making a decision of what was right and fair?" The judicial system in Corinth was corrupt and the side that had the most social or political standing or could provide the biggest bribe would prevail in the courts. Paul had a background of the Jewish judicial system in which it is strictly forbidden for one Jew to give testimony against another Jew in a Gentile court. Such action was considered a reproach to God. To expose a fellow Christian to the corrupt judgment of a "heathen" was a serious sin against your brother. Also, such practices could also open the church to serious criticism and ridicule from those in the world system and in doing this, it would hurt the mission of the church which is to share God's plan of salvation.

In the matter of judging the world, some have thought that Paul was referring to the fact that we shall sit on the throne with Christ and some have argued that we shall be judges of the world during the millennial reign of Christ. Paul may have meant that the church brings judgment on the world when we are following the principles of the Kingdom of God. This would be a judgment in a comparative sense. This is similar to what Jesus said that the men of Nineveh would rise up in judgment against the Jews of the first century because the Ninevites repented when Jonah called for them to repent and they did repent, but the Jews refused to repent when Someone greater than Jonah had come to them.

With regard to "judging angels," this is thought to be a reference to "evil angels" and lying spirits that would come to deceive the church. This is likely a reference to the Spiritual Gift of discerning of spirits that is to operate in the church. If God has equipped the saints with such gifts as being able to recognize good and evil spirits and to have the wisdom that is required to repent and believe the gospel, then surely the saints could have the wisdom and discernment to decide on less eternally significant matters.

Verse four could be interpreted to say that you could choose the least respected member of the church and his judgment would be preferable to using the Corinthian courts. If that verse is read as a question (which is used by many of the more modern versions), then the sense of the verse is that Paul is puzzled why they would let a person (a pagan) who would have no standing whatsoever in the church decide the outcome of a dispute between two Christians. The preferred method would be to find some wise church members and rely on them to decide or arbitrate disputes. However, the members of the church at Corinth were already engaged in litigation against each other in the law courts.

To Exhibit Your Salvation 6:7-11

⁷ Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. *You do* this even to *your* brethren. ⁹ 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. ¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:7-11 (NASB95)

You've heard of a no-win situation. This is what Paul thought about Christian brothers and sisters doing such things to each other that would result in lawsuits. The very fact there was a lawsuit is damning evidence that those involved in such actions were not practicing the principles of the Kingdom of God. There were at least three things happening that should not have been going on in a church. Paul addressed two of these. First is the concern of a Christian's response when he is wronged by another person. Jesus addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount when He taught us to go the second mile and turn the other cheek. Such a response takes a measure of faith to trust God to bring good results out of a bad situation. "The

battle belongs to the Lord and He will fight for us” is a truth and a promise that few of us consider when we are wronged. One thing that we can have confidence in is that when we retaliate and fight back to defend ourselves and assert our rights, then little “good” can come from that. The evidence that is almost always seen is that things simply get worse.

The second concern that Paul addressed is the more serious matter of someone who calls himself a Christian and deliberately defrauds and cheats a fellow Christian. This is blatantly wrong. This is overt unrighteousness. Those who practice such behavior give ample evidence that they are not saved and will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Paul then went on to describe a list of other unrighteous acts that were part of the society that surrounded the church at Corinth.

The third concern that Paul did not address was the failure of the church’s leaders to address the unrighteous behavior of some of the members of the church. The fact that strong leadership was lacking may have been part of the problem that led those being wronged to look to the law courts rather than to the church for relief from those who were cheating them.

Returning to the list of unrighteous behaviors, we see a partial list of wrong actions that can be classified as sins. Notice that Paul started out with sexually related bad practices and move from there to things that were perhaps more related to greed and materialism. Most of these practices were part of the “way of life” for the Corinthian culture of that day. These “socially accepted” sins were obviously places where the church was to be distinctive in refusing to behave in such ways and refusing to accept such behavior among its members.

It is rather disconcerting to read the items of bad behavior that Paul listed and to consider where our cultural norms are headed today. There are people who visit our church who are unmarried couples living together as if they were married. This is pretty much a definition of fornication. The sin of idolatry is included in this list since part of the pagan “religious” practices involved temple prostitutes. I don’t think we see much of that happening today. On the other hand, adultery was common practice in Corinthian society and homosexuality was unrestrained and accepted in that culture. How prevalent was it? Historians claim that 14 of the 15 Caesars were homosexuals or bisexuals. Plato praised homosexual practices in some of his writings. Such practices were open and there was no social condemnation or pressure restraining it. This is quite similar to where we are today. People who are openly homosexual are repeatedly elected and sent to congress, some of the more popular TV personalities have perverted lifestyles and flaunt it in the national media. Speaking against such practices is considered “hate speech.” Many of the liberal church denominations have ordained homosexuals in places of leadership in their organizations.

Approving or disapproving the practice of Christian morality with regard to abnormal sexual behavior has become a dividing line in our society. Unfortunately, even some who are in the more conservative or fundamental groups are found to be involved in immoral behavior while openly disapproving of the very behaviors they practice. In a real sense the practice of Christian morality does give evidence of salvation.

We haven’t even touched on the other things in the list such as stealing, coveting, getting drunk, participating in wild parties, and cheating others. Most church attendees sort of wink at or look the other way in cases of stealing unless it is “really serious.” Coveting is practiced by most of us and we normally have no sense of guilt about it unless this sin leads to something more overt such as adultery, murder, stealing or lying. While most Baptists are against drinking, there are some who have a drinking problem. Most other denominations such as Methodists, Lutherans, and Catholics apparently have no concern with regard to alcohol consumption. Wild parties are more likely to occur with the younger crowd and many college students regardless of

their religious profession will fall into the practice of excessive behavior at such gatherings. In the area of cheating or swindling most people seem to think it is OK as long as you don't get caught.

We would do well to heed Paul's warning that those whose lifestyle conforms to such bad behavior are not saved and will not inherit the Kingdom of God. These behaviors are indicative of being lost and many in the church at Corinth could remember their former life where they lived like the prevailing culture. If their salvation was real, then they had experienced being a new creation in Christ, the old had passed away and all things had become new.

Having addressed some of the blatantly sinful practices, Paul then addressed some practices that were not overtly unlawful but could be thought of in terms of fairness, helpfulness, or simply being courteous or being rude. We see this in verse 12 where he wrote:

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

It would be a mistake to think that Paul is saying that the behaviors he just warned them about were "lawful." When the word "all" is used, it rarely means "all." The Greek word is *pas* and typically means "some of all kinds." What he was telling them and us is that many different behaviors may be lawful but they can also be harmful. A person who lends money might have the right to foreclose and take the property that was used for collateral, but such action might destroy a relationship and produce a bad witness as a Christian. We might even put the use of alcoholic beverages in this category. Not everyone who drinks becomes a drunkard or an alcoholic. While it may be lawful for me to drink, it may hurt my witness and there is a possibility that it could become addictive or I would be "mastered" by it.

Paul then quoted a well-known saying of his day in verse 13 to introduce the next major point he wanted to make regarding the spiritual consequences of our physical behaviors. Sometimes Paul quoted the slogans that were used by the Corinthian. We must be careful in reading this letter that we don't pick up the erroneous slogan and think that it is a Biblical truth.

Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them.

This slogan essentially says that what I do in my physical body does not affect me spiritually. Gluttony, drunkenness, sexual conduct, and such things are NOT just physical things and they either reflect spiritual condition or have influence on our emotional and spiritual condition. Sexuality is linked to our innermost self more than what we eat or drink. Paul tried to give them a new slogan: "The body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body."

To Maintain Your Godliness 6:13b-17

¹³ Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴ Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." ¹⁷ But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. 1 Corinthians 6:13b-17 (NASB95)

To show them how important the body is to the Lord, Paul reminded them that, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we too will experience a bodily resurrection. He continued to support this argument with the statement that our bodies are the members of Christ. When we defile our bodies, then we are defiling Christ's body. We could expand this statement to include our minds. When we defile our minds, then we are defiling Christ's body. We need to remember that righteous is as righteous does. We cannot be godly when we are engaged in ungodly behavior.

To Safeguard Your Well-Being 6:18-20

¹⁸ Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. ¹⁹ 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. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NASB95)

Notice Paul's remedy for such temptations to sin. RUN! Don't walk but run from such things. This is the example of Joseph when he was confronted by Potiphar's wife. In such situations in which we are confronted by temptations that appeal to natural desires that can be good if they are carried out in the proper context (such as sexual relations within marriage), then if we do not deal with these temptations ruthlessly, then we will wind up rationalizing improper behavior.

It seems that they had a third slogan: "Every sin that a man does is without the body." In other words, sin is in the spiritual or emotional realm, only. Paul's argument is that the particular sin of fornication is a sin against the body. Since our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, then we are defiling something that is sacred. We fail to realize that we are not our own. We belong to God. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein. This is especially true for Christians because we have been redeemed (bought back) by the blood of Jesus. Consequently, we should be using both our body and our spirits to bring glory to God.