

TEMPLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: A LOOK AT THE CONTEXT BEHIND 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-20!

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Reading the Corinthian letters have become very reflective on a contemporary setting over the past few years to me and the idea of 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 with regards to the temple of the Holy Spirit has been particularly in my interests. But, to truly understand its meaning it is important to follow the intent of authorship and the meaning it would have to the first century Corinthian. The hope is that through this paper there will come an understanding of this passage and the context behind it within the Corinthian people.

Philo illustrated the Geeks argument with resolve by saying “they (the Sophists) leave no stone unturned, as the saying is, while they ply their questions ‘Is not the body the soul’s house?’ ‘Why then, should we not take care of a house, that it may not fall into ruin?’ ‘Are not eyes and ears and the band of other senses body-guards and courtiers, as it were, of the soul?’ ‘Must we not then value allies and friends equally with ourselves?’ ‘Did nature create pleasures and enjoyments and the delights that meet us all the way through life for the dead, or for those who had never come into existence, and not for the living?’ ‘And what is to induce us to forego the acquisition of wealth and fame and honors and offices and everything else of that sort, things which secure for us a life not merely of safety but of happiness?’”¹

It is this very argument that the church in Corinth is debating and the one Paul is trying to argue against. “You may say, “I am allowed to do anything.” But I reply, “Not everything is good for you.” (1 Cor. 6:12) are the words which bring public rebuke against the selfish pursuits of those in the church. Paul’s letter and our passage is meant to expose the shame in the Corinthians actions and drive them to repentance and transformation. Ben Witherington writes that “This letter would be read before the whole congregation and would be a humiliating public shaming.”²

¹ Bruce W. Winter. (After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.), Pg. 78.

² Witherington III, Ben. (Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.) Pg. 164.

The specific passage of 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 seems to focus on two purposes Paul wants to communicate to the Corinthians in their transformation. The first is the way in which Christians are to treat the body as part of the *imago dei* (image of God) and the other is “the practical implications of an eschatological worldview for present sexual conduct.”³

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians give many warnings against wrongful Christian living as Anthony Thiselton writes, “These include the sins of self centered desire, sexual abuses, issues about idols, damaging the weak, and drunkenness at the Lord’s Supper.”⁴ Other lists include the Corinthians acts of jealousy and verbal abuse (1 Cor. 13:4-5), and warnings against idolatry fornication, grumbling, eating and drinking (10:20-21).

The list we find in 1 Corinthian 6:9 however seem to be divided between two focuses of sexual sin and the pursuit of selfish or gluttonous desires. In either case Thiselton points out “Neither the “sexual” sins nor the “greed, grasping” sins have prior condemnation over the other: both concern the body.”⁵ Whether a church member was involving themselves in improper sexual activities or gorging themselves at feasts and festivals the sinful act was equally inadequate for Christian behavior. In specifically looking at the issues behind the sexual immorality taking place in Corinth Paul seems to focus on the homosexuality taking place with the people. This practice was common with Greek culture as Witherington says “Pederasty, molestation of minors by adult males, was the most common form of homosexuality in antiquity.”⁶ Even if this was the case for this passage it was clear that Paul’s consideration of any homosexual practice was considered immoral and not acceptable in a Christian worldview (Rom. 1:26-27).

Some have tried to indicate that the immoral sexual activity taking place in the Corinthian church may have been connected to the earlier part of the chapter and the legal autonomous rights of the

³ Witherington III, Ben. (Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.) Pg. 164.

⁴ Thiselton, Anthony C. (N.I.G.T.C.: The First Epistle to the Corinthians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) Pg. 448.

⁵ Thiselton, Anthony C. (N.I.G.T.C.: The First Epistle to the Corinthians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) Pg. 451.

⁶ Witherington III, Ben. (Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.) Pg. 166.

Christian individual.⁷ It was seen this way a possibility because in that time woman were seen as property and any legal disputes about them (i.e. divorce, prostitution, ect.) were handled by property courts.

Corinth was also over looked by the Acro-Corinth and the temple of Aphrodite which may have practiced prostitution however, in Paul's condemning of prostitution he most likely was reacting to the mind set the Corinthians were placing on the use of prostitutes. They were not viewing these activities and acts of worship but rather allowing their own selfish pride to create the belief that ones spirit was elevated above the physical acts of ones body. Bruce Winter has said, "Being people of the spirit, they imply, has moved them to a higher plane, the realm of the spirit, where they are unaffected by behavior that has merely to do with the body."⁸

The Corinthians had miss-interpreted the understanding of being made in God's image and the work of salvation through it. It is why in verse 11 that Paul exposes the true nature and power of God's salvation by saying "There was a time when some of you were just like that, but now your sins have been washed away, and you have been set apart for God. You have been made right with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God have done for you." Paul's view of salvation and transformation is one of physicality as well as spiritual. This view destroys the argument of natural response and instead points to ones behavior and ability in "choice". Paul's message is the empowerment of true human "free-will"!

This is a radical message to the people of Corinth who in cultural perspective "did not see how bodily behavior defiled the spirit or ones spiritual condition."⁹ In the minds of the people of Corinth, the presence of wealth and power was equated and interpreted through the amount of ability in which you could do as you pleased. Winter describes it by saying, "It would seem that there was a long established convention in the ancient world for people of status and power to articulate their

⁷ Thiselton, Anthony C. (N.I.G.T.C.: The First Epistle to the Corinthians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000) Pg. 447.

⁸ Bruce W. Winter. (After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.), Pg. 87.

actions on the bases that ‘all things are permitted.’¹⁰ It is directly connected to the words which Paul used in chapter 6:12.

By pointing out God’s possession over us in verses 19 and 20, Paul is saying our rights are defined by God’s will and not our own. It is the main focus in Paul’s letter that the treatment and active use of the body should be in accord holistically in the will of God. That is where we can find our true freedom and learn to grow in metamorphic transformation.

“NOW WITH GOD’S HELP, I SHALL BECOME MYSELF.”

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

⁹ Witherington III, Ben. (Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.) Pg. 168.

¹⁰ Bruce W. Winter. (After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.), Pg. 81.

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3. Winter, Bruce W. *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.
4. *iLumina PC Bible (NLT)*, Encyclopedia, Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, U.S.A., 2000.