

## Teaching Plan EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: March 11, 2018

Lesson Title: "Glorifying God"

Lesson Passage: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

### ABOUT THIS LESSON

Paul encountered two quite different heresies in the Corinthian church, the congregation that he had founded. One was the teaching of Judaizers, who insisted on strict obedience to the law of Moses, including adherence to rigid dietary regulations; but the other was the moral licentiousness that was imbedded in Corinth's pagan culture. In our lesson passage, Paul responds to the latter heresy, which was based on the notion that the spiritual and physical aspects of human personality are entirely separate. He rejects the assumption that promiscuous sexual conduct is simply natural, like sleeping and eating, and is unrelated to a person's spiritual nature.

### TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain how Paul's interpretation of human sexual behavior differed from the typical attitude of the Corinthians. (2) Explain how promiscuous sexual conduct negates the claim that one belongs to Christ.

### BEGINNING THE LESSON

Recall that toward the end of the year 2017, our news media were filled with reports of sexual abuse by prominent people in politics, academia and the entertainment industry. Observe that the problem of sexual misconduct has an ancient history, and that it was one of the issues that Paul had to deal with in his letters to the Christian community in ancient Corinth, where sexual dalliance was acceptable in everyday life and was given a prominent place in Corinth's most popular religion, the worship of the pagan goddess Aphrodite. Some members of the Christian fellowship in Corinth were ignoring the principle that Paul would set forth years later in his letter to Rome, "be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2).

### TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Observe that when Paul wrote "All things are lawful for me," in 1 Cor. 6:12, he probably was quoting a saying that was popular in Corinth.* (This is why several Bible versions--e.g., RSV, NIV, TEV, CEV--put this saying in quotation marks.) Some of the Christians in Corinth had adopted the Greek notion that a person's spiritual nature is entirely unrelated to his or her physical makeup. Therefore, they could do anything they liked with their bodies, whether feeding them food (v. 13) or using them for sexual gratification, because their bodies did not matter.

2. *Comment on what was probably another popular Corinthian saying, in verse 13, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food":* (1) Suggest that this saying probably was popular among the libertines (the "anything goes" crowd). The implication of the saying was that just as the stomach was made to digest food, so was the body made for sexual activity; so, both were regarded as simply natural functions that had nothing to do with one's spiritual nature. (2) But what does Paul mean by "God will destroy both"? *Suggest this interpretation:* The stomach and food are both passing things; the day will come when the digestive process will pass away. But the body as a whole is synonymous with one's total personality, and that will not pass away. (3) As such, one's body (the whole person) is made for union with Christ. But if a professed Christian

joins his body to a harlot, he becomes one with her, giving what rightly belongs to Christ to someone else.

3. *Note that this thought is reiterated in 1 Cor. 6:16:* Engaging in a sexual relationship with a prostitute (v. 16) is not merely an isolated physical act. According to Genesis 2:24, when two persons are united in a sexual union, they become "one flesh." Therefore, when a Christian man gives his body to a harlot, he is prostituting to someone else what belongs to Christ.

4. *Elaborate on the meaning of verse 17:* The Apostle Paul rejected the popular belief that the body was merely the physical habitat of a person. In his thinking, the body was not just a piece of baggage that a person possessed; it was the external manifestation of the whole person, and the whole person of a Christian belongs to the Lord (v. 15).

5. *Suggest that 1 Cor. 6:18 might well be prefaced by the word, "Therefore," for here we have the culmination of Paul's reasoning in the previous verses:* (1) In the exhortation "Shun immorality" (RSV) the literal meaning of "shun" is "run away from" or "flee" (KJV). Paul is saying, "Have nothing to do with immorality." (2) There are, of course, many kinds of behavior that could be labeled "immorality" (e.g., lying, cheating, stealing, misusing power). But Paul obviously is referring to sexual immorality here, in the same sense that he has used the term in 1 Cor. 5:1, where he was referring to a man who was living in an illicit relationship with his stepmother.

6. *Observe that, in v. 19, we have a fundamental doctrine regarding the nature of salvation:* The Holy Spirit dwells within the Christian believer. IMPLICATIONS: (1) The Holy Spirit is not a natural possession of all humans, but comes to the believer through the risen Christ. (2) The Spirit is not the exclusive possession of a select few; that distinction belongs to all believers (in 1 Cor. 3:16 Paul says to the whole congregation, "you are God's temple").

## CLOSING THE LESSON

In 1885, the Victorian writer Ernest Henley published "Invictus," a poem that ends with the words, **"It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll. I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."** Though Henley's defiant words have inspired many readers in literary circles, they are at odds with Paul's concluding argument against sexual dalliance in the life of a Christian:

"You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20).

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