

What not to do

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 April 2013

Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0 : 00] So we're in the middle of 1 Corinthians now, and in some ways it can seem a little tedious because it seems very negative in many ways.

! It's all about things that we shouldn't be doing. And I put that, I bet you know that song, written in about 1944 by a guy called Johnny Mercer, but he did say he actually based the words on a church sermon.

And it says, accentuate the positive, but to do that we need to eliminate the negative. And I wonder if you've ever thought actually, if you, I put the abridged version of the Ten Commandments up there on the slide.

Almost all of them tell you not to do something. There are a couple of exceptions. The one about the father and mother is stated positively, honour your father and mother.

And it does say remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, but then as it's expanded it then tells you all the things you shouldn't do on the Sabbath day.

[1 : 28] Now that's, if you think about it as a little odd, because God was telling the people of Israel, in a sense, what he was like, and what he expected of them.

And to put it rather negatively like that, seems a bit strange really, it's strictly to our modern way of thinking where we always like to accentuate the positive.

And actually, it's also interesting that when Jesus was asked the question by what is the most important part of the law, he didn't quote the Ten Commandments, as perhaps we would have done.

He actually says this, the most important one is this, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

And the second is this, love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these. Now, Jesus didn't make these words up.

[2 : 38] He is quoting from the books of the law. The first part is from Deuteronomy, and, well, Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 and 5, about loving the Lord your God with all your heart, and the bit about loving your neighbour, which often people think Jesus made up.

It's often said as, you know, his characteristic of his teaching, but it is in fact a quote from the book of Leviticus. Now, actually, this seed says, if you like, it says much the same thing as the Ten Commandments, but it says it positively.

The first one says that the first few commandments, the Ten Commandments, of course are about our relationship to God, and Jesus says, actually, you can sum them up by saying we should love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength.

And the rest of the Ten Commandments are, of course, about our relationship with our fellow humans, our neighbours, as they put it. And the second commandment that Jesus quotes here is love your neighbour as yourself.

So, in fact, he is really referring, in a sense, to the Ten Commandments, but he's putting a positive spin on them, if you like to use that term, rather than a negative spin.

[4 : 04] And in fact, the Puritan, Thomas Watson, who wrote a book on the Ten Commandments, actually made this point. He said that when the Ten Commandments forbid something, they are actually commending its opposite.

And that when you read them, you should sort of bear this in mind. And Paul takes a similar approach here. The fact is that, really, to explain what we should be doing, it's difficult, actually, to avoid explaining what we shouldn't be doing, by contrast.

But we need to think, I think, that he's not just saying what we shouldn't be doing, he is actually encouraging us in positive holiness and in positive behaviour.

And of course, as we all know, in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul expounds the importance and supremacy of love, if you like, putting the things positively. But before he gets to that point, he tackles the negatives.

He goes, if you like, to explain what love for fellow Christians is not. And today, in Christian circles, as I've said, in the world, we like to be positive.

[5 : 17] But you can't have, in a sense, a positive without a negative. In order to accentuate the positive, we do have to eliminate the negative. And we most definitely, as I said, should not mess with Mr. In-Between, which is what some of the Corinthians are trying to do.

So, let's have a look at this passage then. Well, as you have seen, when we read it, Paul deals with two aspects in this chapter.

First of all, disputes between believers. And we might relate that to the Ten Commandments that we read, that you shall not covet. And the second is about sexual immorality.

Now, clearly, that relates to the command, you shall not commit adultery. Or, I heard recently, the politically correct, it's not called adultery anymore, it's called relational mobility.

That's the politically correct term. So, if you meet any emerging church Christians or other post-moderns, you'll be able to talk to them now, because you'll know what relational mobility is.

[6 : 25] Did at least, when I heard it, it was used by, actually, it was used in a book by somebody who was attacking it. It's used, so it wasn't to, but at least they had said it was the sin of relational mobility, which I suppose is something.

They hadn't got rid of the word sin, but, anyway, that's by the way. You shall not commit adultery, but, actually, what is slightly strange about, or interesting, really, about this second issue, is that Paul also relates this issue of sexual morality to not making an idol.

As we see that in verse 17, well, 16 and 17, 17 and 19, sorry, about the body being a temple of the Holy Spirit. In other words, well, we'll come back to this, but he is, I think, relating it, actually, to the sin of idolatry, as well as the sin of adultery.

So, what we're going to do is simply look at these points in a bit more detail. Now, if you go to law, you do so, presumably, with the expectation of winning your case.

You believe that you are of the right of it, and that your opponent has done something wrong, and that the judge is going to set that right.

[7 : 50] And, of course, nowadays, we have all these adverts on the television of people, of solicitors, and other people trying to persuade you to go around and sue somebody.

So, you know, if you've just fallen over in the road, it has to be somebody's fault nowadays. But you do, at least, if you go to law, you assume, or you hope, that you're in the right, and you will be shown to be in the right, and that you will win, and your opponent will lose.

Otherwise, what's the point in doing it? But, Paul says that if you go to court against another believer, then actually, you've already lost the case.

Verse 7, the very fact you have lawsuits among you means you've been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

In fact, Paul says that in this particular court, there are only losers. What does he mean by that?

Well, assuming the complaint actually is genuine, that something really wrong has been done, then the defendant has been defeated, because he has coveted and stolen something belonging to a brother.

[9 : 06] But also, the plaintiff has been defeated as well, because he's forgotten that Jesus said to bless those who curse you and pray for those who ill-treat you. And if someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other also.

If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. And so, Paul picks this idea up, doesn't he, and says, you've been defeated already, why not rather be wronged?

And, in fact, there's a third loser in this court as well, because Jesus has lost out as well, because remember that Jesus said, by this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

And if we're going around suing each other, particularly parading this dispute before unbelievers, then his words are rendered meaningless, aren't they? They won't be saying, you know, you'll see

that my disciples, if you love one another, they'll be saying, what idiots these Christians are. Can't even get on with each other and these minor things. So in this court, there are always losers. And, really, there's not much more to say to it about that than that, is there?

[10:28] We shouldn't be suing each other, but what we should be doing of course is positively encouraging, promoting the benefit of others, even at sacrifice to ourselves.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, Paul says in Galatians, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers. So we shouldn't be looking to do each other down, we should be looking for mutual benefit.

Even among the things of this world, we should be looking to help each other out, not try and steal from each other. Simple as that, really. Not much more to be said, but this is the thing that we need to be reminded about.

It is perhaps worth noting that in verse 4, Paul does acknowledge it might sometimes be necessary to settle an issue between believers. And he says that if you should do that, surely, there will be somebody in the church who's competent to do that.

Of course, we know that a few years ago we had an issue with the Wellbe Mission over this particular building. It was necessary to decide the legal ownership of the building and the two houses which have now been sold off.

[11:40] But I'm glad to say that neither side resorted to the civil law. We both said at the start we're not going to do that. We did actually get a lawyer involved and to some extent he was involved but he was a lawyer who was a believer so we found somebody in the church who was competent to help out.

And so I think occasionally perhaps we will have to judge issues of this nature between us but we should do it by looking for mutual benefit not by looking to play one off against the other and get as much as you can out of it but rather how can we both benefit from this situation.

And so it does occur occasionally but then we can find, we can find a different way of dealing with it as we did over this particular issue. He also points out that if you go to law in this way you're in danger of not just losing the case but being disinherited as well.

Of course that's what he says isn't it in verse how is it verse 9 do you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God and do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers or so on I won't read the whole list but not only is the particular issue of this world at risk if you go to court if you bite each other as Paul calls it earlier on in the letter but you list you risk losing something far greater not just losing your field or house or whatever the dispute is about but losing your internal inheritance oh ok that's not good what's happened right I think maybe it's run out of power sorry let me just very briefly plug it in again

I'll carry on anyway but plug the power in probably as I might find I can't get the slides back then well I'll try and get it back on but we might have to carry on without the slides is that going to come back on I don't know well anyway what I want to I'll try and get the slides back but what I want to do now for the rest of the time is look at this second issue the issue of sexual immorality and that actually is somewhat more complicated than the first issue here and in fact oh yeah sorry just before I do that I did want to mention one thing you'll notice that in this second half of the chapter [14:58] Paul talks a lot about the body now I've always assumed that refers to the individual body the individual you know our own bodies but I did read one person who pointed out that everywhere else in the Corinthians when it talks about the body it refers actually to the church and also that in verse 19 when he talks about the you do you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit the you there or your is actually the plural form so it has been suggested that perhaps the body referred to here is the church but I personally I find that a bit hard to go with because he does quote this verse about uniting with a prostitute and they shall become one which clearly refers to individual sexual acts so I think

I'm going to stick with the more traditional view that it refers to the individual question but I thought that was at least an interesting idea that it was worth thinking about that it might actually be referring to sinning against the body of the church but it doesn't make too much difference but it would be nice to be sure what is meant there am I going to get any oh it's come back that's a good sign okay shouldn't take too long to get it up again so I will get it up again oh my cap okay I doubt that this is going to work now okay I'll forget that I'll just use the keys yeah so but anyway so let's look at what he says here about sexual morality and in fact I think there are three views of sexual morality that are looked at in this section which we can pick out and the first view what is

known as the Gnostic view and it is generally considered that there was a lot of Gnostic influence in Corinthian church and the thing about Gnosticism was that it took the view that spiritual things were distinct from material things and so when he says here in verse 13 he's saying food for the stomach and the stomach for food he's saying that what happens in the stomach and the body and food has nothing to do at all with spiritual realities and therefore you can just do what you like it doesn't matter it's a physical need that needs to be fulfilled but has no effect at all on the spirit it's if you like an itch to be scratched in the most convenient way possible and it's okay to enjoy the experience but it doesn't really matter very much and so to this view sexual freedom is an example of Christian freedom and so he quotes doesn't he says in verse 12 everything is permissible for me and yes okay says Paul but you've actually been set free from bondage he says so why on earth do you want to sell yourself back into slavery and that's what you're doing if you say okay sexual licentiousness is alright because you'll find it takes you over and you will be mastered by it so having been made free and having claimed your freedom you will soon find that you've sold yourself back into slavery and that is the point that Paul makes it is simply not true that what we do in the body has no spiritual significance and Paul is very keen all the way through to make that very clear that it certainly does matter now the second view that was around a lot at the time is the pagan view and the pagan view in a sense is almost the exact opposite of the gnostic view because to the pagan sex is of the utmost spiritual significance and there's another song here I haven't put it on the slide but do you know the

Fairport convention song says come all you roving minstrels and together we will try to rouse the spirit of the earth and move the rolling sky well if you've got this is sympathetic magic the sky god and the earth mother have to be controlled into doing their thing so that the earth will be fertile and we'll have enough to eat it seems that over the winter they forget how to do it there seems to be the thinking behind it but doing this with music is a bit tricky it's alright if you have the talent of Fairport convention but most of us don't so they used to do it with sex sex is so much simpler so much easier you don't have to be James Bond or Mata Hari to make the earth move do you that's why we use that expression isn't it don't know where it comes from but did the earth move for you it's sympathetic magic any halfway competent temple prostitute will be able to do that for you and this surely is what Paul's getting at with his references to temples he's actually saying that in fact this is a form of idolatry now it's interesting that paganism has always been popular in [21 : 40] Africa and parts of the east but for a thousand years or so it's been a product not available in the west but recently that has changed now you can become a druid again or some other form of paganism now available it's like G.K.

Chesterton said when people stop believing in God they start believing in anything and so we have paganism reintroduced Paul's response to this actually is quite radical isn't it in the Old Testament the prophets used to rail against these pagan sexual practices remember all these prophecies against the Baals and the Asherah Poles and of course also they often used adultery as a metaphor for spiritual apostasy what Paul does here is take this prophetic idea to its logical conclusion and say that actually they're the same thing sexual immorality is idolatry and I think if we don't make that link then verse 18 actually seems rather odd doesn't it because verse 18 says flee from sexual immorality all other sins a man commits are outside his body but he who sins sexually sins against his own body now when you think about it that actually sounds a bit odd because surely there are other sins that are against your own body surely drunkenness or gluttony other forms of self-harm are sins against your own body and yet remember actually Jesus actually said something that perhaps the

Gnostics latched onto I don't know but said that remember it's not really food that makes you unclean because that just goes in and comes out the other end it's what comes from inside that makes you unclean and so what's Paul getting at here when he says a man's sins commits are outside his body but he who sins sexually sins against his own body it seems to me that whether you take the body here to be your individual body or the church he's saying here that well he does say here don't you know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in other words the place where you're supposed to be meeting with God is where you're actually meeting with an idol you're making taking this pagan idol and bringing that into the temple if you want to put it that way you become in committing this sexual sin your whole body is immersed in idolatry and you become one with the idol and this perhaps by analogy is the case for all sexual sins you may think well surely that only applies to the temple prostitutes and I suppose literally it does but Paul seems to be expanding that

actually to all forms of sexual immorality and saying you're bringing an idol into the temple of the Holy

Spirit so what is the Christian view now that's one reason why I thought it was worth pushing this thing because there's going to be a lot more about that I think but in summary in a brief summary what is the Christian view of sexual union and sexual morality and Paul as Jesus himself did quotes this verse from Genesis about where is it where it is said the two will become one flesh sorry it's due to on me actually not Genesis but sexual union is the defining act of marriage even more than the marriage service marriage is not primarily a legal issue as David

Cameron seems to want to make it it's primarily a spiritual issue now I think I would say contrary to the Catholic view it's not only for the propagation of the species although of course in the Old Testament having inheritance in the land is an important topic but I think it's more than that because the Christian view sex is about spiritual union and completion because in Genesis 127 it says that God created man in his own image male and female created he them and then in the story of the garden the female as it were is separated from the male

[26 : 57] Adam and when they came together in sexual congress then they are reunited and they become in a sense a more complete being and this is the Christian view that is surely being said here the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts and so what can we what does this tell us about sexual behaviour first of all it's characterised by faithfulness because they become one flesh you can't sort of mix and match they become one say the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts and so humans are supposed to pair bond for life if you want to use the biological term some animals do pair bonds others don't but humans are supposed to and yet so often we don't it's odd isn't it

I mean animals either do or you know birds it's usually most species the birds pair bond and they do it faithfully for years don't seem to have a problem with that but we humans do and when they don't do this it's always regarded in the bible as a spiritual failure for whatever reason it always gets complicated like David and Bathsheba and leads on to all sorts of other sins because we're not supposed to live like that and it also implies that ideally every child should have a father and mother this is a deeply unpopular principle in the new in the current age yet the male and the child needs a male and a female parent because they're different and they need to receive from both now of course this has always been a hard thing there's always been no there are people who are widowed they're orphans but then in the scripture there's always a special place reserved for the widow and the orphan because that completion is broken and it's regarded as an undesirable state nowadays it seems to be regarded as the desirable way to do things but it isn't a child should have a father and mother and if for some reason it doesn't then that need has to be fulfilled by some other means but ideally family should be a father and a mother and of course for this reason we reject same-sex marriage same-sex relationships can be very faithful as I think the new

Archbishop of Canterbury pointed out he did say at least that he nevertheless he supports the church position on marriage but he didn't go on to defend it very well I have to say but this is the reason because it is the uniting of the male and the female principles to make say something that is greater than the sum of the parts and we need to stand up for this view it's very much been attacked over the last 30 40 50 years and it's got eroded on all sides and it's going to get eroded further I'm sure things that now are still regarded as unacceptable will soon be regarded as acceptable if we don't turn its back everything less than this damages our families and so even in the world we could say well we'll do this in the church but it's no good worrying about it in the world but the world even in the world we need to take the view that we need proper families because our society is based on families that's the way our society human society is organised it's organised in families and so we need proper families but still it's also worth saying that oh what's gone wrong there oh dear sorry I've got sorry I messed up my slides there

I had two oh no that is right sorry that is quite right yeah that is right it is also true that this union between man and women is actually limited it's limited by death and in Jesus says this doesn't he to the Sadducees in the resurrection this is Matthew 22 verse 30 in the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage they will be like the angels in heaven but so it is limited by death presumably in heaven it's replaced by something greater than that and perhaps Paul's hinting about that when he talks about the union with the Holy Spirit spiritual union with God in the Holy Spirit so perhaps marriage in the resurrection is replaced by something greater so it is limited to that extent and that does have implications for this life and that's what

