



## A Study of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

### Lesson 10: God, Even Over Our Chips<sup>1</sup>...

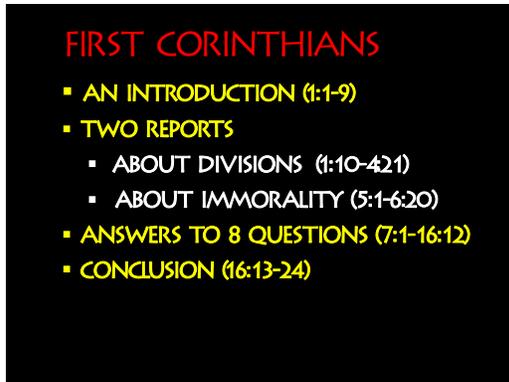
#### 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Now we come this morning to the end of the second section of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

I am making the point because it is important to me that you be able to keep the structure of the letter straight in your minds. I think that keeping the structure of the letter straight in your minds is helpful because as you study the book for yourself...and I do hope you are reading and studying it...it will prevent you from drawing wrong conclusions or making wrong applications from what you read and from losing your place in Paul's argument in the overall ebb and flow of the book.

Now what I want you to remember is that Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians is made up of four sections...an introduction, a section regarding a couple of reports that Paul had received, a section in which Paul answers eight questions had posed to him in a letter and lastly a conclusion with all of the normal sort of greetings and salutations.

This morning, as I said, we've come to the end of the second section...the section regarding the two reports that Paul had received.

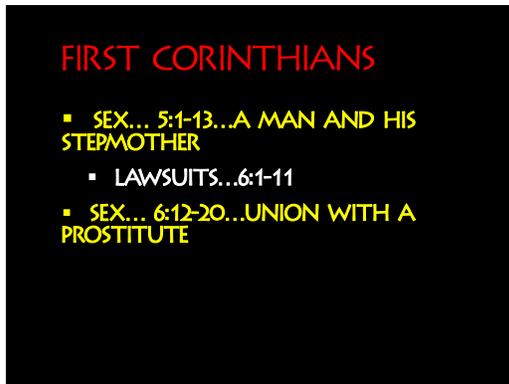


The first of those two reports contained the facts about the ongoing divisions in Corinth. It concerned how the church had divided up into various preacher factions and how that had led to continuing bickering and jealousy.

The second of those reports concerned the fact that there was a notorious case of immorality at Corinth...a case involving a man who either married or moved in with his stepmother. We read and talked about that in chapter 5. But that report continued on and also concerned the fact that someone at Corinth had felt compelled to take one of the other Christian brothers at Corinth to civil court to resolve some sort of wrong (probably the defrauding of either money or property) that they had suffered at his hand...and by civil court I mean civil, pagan court. We read and talked about that particular instance two weeks ago in the first eleven verses of chapter 6.

Now this morning we come to the close of the section regarding the various reports Paul had received and what we find is a bit surprising...what we find, is that Paul turns again to the subject of sex.

I mentioned last week that the pattern appears to be chiasmic...that is, it forms a literary sandwich...in which the issue of aberrant sexual behavior forms two bookends and the issue of lawsuits stands in between. The pattern is known as an A B A' pattern and is very common in biblical literature.



Now that fact has been a real concern to commentators over the years because it has put them in the awkward position of trying to explain Paul's underlying purpose in bringing up the issue again.<sup>2</sup> They find themselves trying to explain why Paul feels the need to revisit the topic. Was it because he failed to mention everything he had heard in the report he had received or was it that he felt the need to address some underlying attitude that contributed to the kind of thinking that would permit a man to bed his stepmother or to take another believer for whom Christ had died before a pagan judge.

I think it is the latter...that is, I think that in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Paul is dealing with the underlying attitude or theological position that has allowed the Corinthian believers to lose sight of the fact that not all behavior is the same...that freedom to eat a ham sandwich does not necessarily imply the freedom to engage in sexual immorality. That freedom to drink wine does not

imply a freedom to get drunk...that freedom to enjoy a mate's body does not imply the freedom to troll the internet and engage in every sexual lust that comes along. To Paul's way of thinking some things are *adiaphora*,<sup>3</sup> that is, they are inconsequential...they are the kinds of thing that don't really matter; some things are not *adiaphora*, that is, they really do matter. In fact, they matter very much.

I think that is the point Paul is trying to make here. Listen to how Gordon Fee puts it...

As in the preceding two sections, Paul comes out arguing. In contrast to those sections, however, he does not begin by attacking the illicit behavior rather he confronts the theology on which that behavior is predicated.<sup>4</sup>



Do you get what Fee is saying? He is saying that Paul returns to the issue of sexual immorality here not simply to discuss a particular sin (although that may have happened...that is, he may have really been talking about Corinthian believers frequenting prostitutes.)

Rather, Paul brought up the issue to expose the kind of thinking that lay behind the Corinthians' failures in the first place.

You see, the Corinthians seem to have thought that their bodies were spiritually unimportant...that it was perfectly acceptable to meet any of the natural urges of their bodies regardless of whether those urges involved simple things like physical hunger or more questionable things like sexual lusts.

Now the way Paul is going to respond to their thinking is a bit of a surprise...he doesn't simply say, "Look here you spiritual pygmies...the Scripture says, **"Thou shalt not commit adultery."**"<sup>5</sup>" No, what he does instead is to explain that **"hunger pangs"** and **"sexual lusts"** are not the same kind of desire. In other words, the Corinthians were not comparing **"apples"** to **"apples."** Rather, they were comparing **"apples"** and **"ethylene glycol."** And the problem was that while both apples and ethylene glycol sweet...they do not produce the same kind of response when they are consumed.



Now, all of that having been said let's turn at last to our text for the morning...1 Corinthians 6:12-20. In particular, I want to start with verses 12.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:12...**"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything.

Now the first thing I want you to notice is how different verse 12 is from verse 11.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:11**...And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Verse 11 is Paul's analysis of what the Corinthians used to be like before they were redeemed...verse 12, on the other hand, breaks into some sort of quotation or familiar catch-phrase...some sort of slogan.

Now almost all commentators agree on this point...that is, that verse 12 represents some sort of theological catch-phrase that was being invoked at Corinth. Now the question is, **"Was this particular catch-phrase one that the Corinthians came up with on their own or was it one that they had learned from the Apostle Paul?"**

Calvin thought it was a phrase developed by the Corinthians.

These words, *All things are lawful for me*, must be understood as spoken in name of the Corinthians, as though he had said, I am aware of the reply which you are accustomed to make, when desirous to avoid reproof for outward vices. You pretend that *all things are lawful* for you, without any reserve or limitation.<sup>6</sup>

Most modern commentators agree with Calvin. One of them, a commentator named Ben Witherington sees a number of these catch-phrases in 1 Corinthians.

Listen to how he puts it:

Beginning in vs. 12 Paul quotes some of the Corinthians' slogans and then qualifies or rejects them. These slogans include: **"Everything is permitted to me" (6:10; 10:23)**, **"It is good for a man not touch a woman" (7:1)**, **"All of us possess**

**knowledge” (8:1), “No idol in this world really exists” (8:4), “Food will not bring us close to God” (8:8), and “There is no resurrection of the dead” (15:2).<sup>7</sup>**

Do you see what Witherington is saying? He is saying something to the effect that Paul is quoting the Corinthians and saying, **“Now you keep saying ‘everything is permitted to me’ but hold on a minute...that’s not always true.”**

Other commentators think that there was only one catch-phrase or at most two and that this particular phrase originated with Paul himself and that it is one that he used often and that in this context Paul is not quoting the Corinthians but rather applying his normative teaching to their case.<sup>8</sup>

I have to tell you, I am not convinced of that.

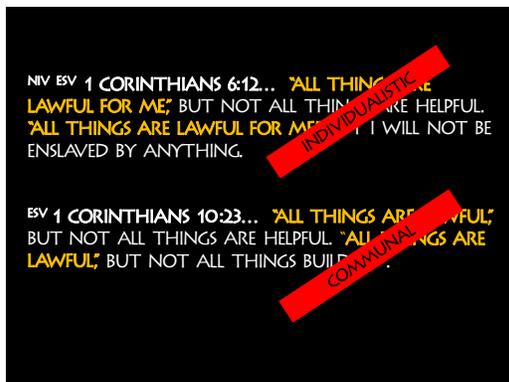
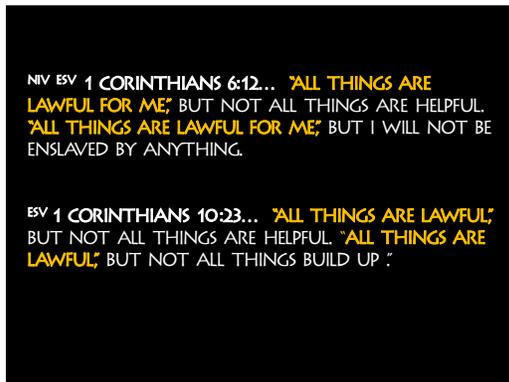
Still, there is one other view...the view held by Charles Hodge...that the Corinthians had learned the phrase from Paul and were applying the rule to things that Paul had absolutely never intended.<sup>9</sup>

You see what Hodge argues is that the Corinthians perverted Paul’s teaching regarding Christian liberty. What he argues is that the Corinthians took Paul’s argument with the Jews in Corinth regarding the fact that the food restrictions of the Old Covenant no longer applied and that they now possessed, in Christ, the freedom to eat whatever they pleased...and perverted that argument and applied it to any other fleshly desire that their bodies might produce. You see they perverted Christian liberty and turned it into lawlessness...that is, they became antinomian. But we’ll see more about how that argument is laid out in a moment.

The other I want you to notice is that this idea is repeated twice in First Corinthians. It occurs in verse 12 and it occurs in 1 Corinthians 10:23.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:12...**"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 10:23...**"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up



Now without discussing the context of chapter 10, the one thing that I think you can see is clearly different is that the first verse is personal...individualistic. While the second verse is communal...that is, group oriented. Do you see what I mean? Paul here in chapter six is focusing on those individuals that believe that have the personal freedom to do whatever they want...whenever they want.

While in chapter 10, Paul is focusing on those individuals that believe they can do whatever they want and that they have no obligation to the body of believers as a group.

Now let's put verse 12 and 13 together.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:12...**"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. **"All things are lawful for me,"** but I will not be enslaved by anything. <sup>13</sup> **"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.**

Now do you see what Paul is arguing? He is arguing something like this, **"O.K. it is true that 'everything is permissible'...that is, you do have a measure of Christian liberty...but that does not mean that everything that can be done ought to be done. Not everything that can be done...will lead to good. You have to apply a little spiritual common-sense to each situation. That doesn't mean some sort of situational ethics either. 'Everything is permissible'...but we ought not let our freedom lead to spiritual bondage. Yes, it is true that the stomach is for food and food is for the stomach...that is natural and right...but end the end they will come to nothing...both your stomach and your food...your body is something else altogether...it is not specifically designed for fulfilling physical lusts...it is more than just an instrument to fulfill your fleshly desires. It is the instrument you possess to glorify God. Don't you see that?"**

I think Gordon Fee is right here when he says, **"What Paul will not let them do is to take that slogan, which has to do with the irrelevancy of food restrictions and apply it to illicit sexual encounters."**<sup>10</sup>

"WHAT PAUL WILL NOT LET THEM DO IS TO TAKE THAT SLOGAN, WHICH HAS TO DO WITH THE IRRELEVANCY OF FOOD RESTRICTIONS AND APPLY IT TO ILLICIT SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS."

You see, Paul's point is very clear here. And he follows up that point with the reason why he knows that God views our bodies to be important...notice verse 14; it's a wonderful piece of logic.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:14**...And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

You see his point is the body is important...the Corinthians can argue all they want that it doesn't matter...but the resurrection of the Lord Jesus proves that the body does, in fact, matter. And the Lord has promised to raise our bodies in the same way he raised the Lord Jesus. This particular fact is made clear by the resurrection and it is made clear by our union with Christ. Look at verse 15.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:15**...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!

You see our bodies are members of Christ...they are the physical members of Christ's body on earth. We are in union with Christ in a way that is greater than just our bodies but that certainly includes our bodies. And his point is that each individual believer has an important role to play in the Body of Christ.

Now from that point Paul goes on to finish his argument and it is hard to know whether he is talking about a specific case...that is, whether some of the men at Corinth were frequenting prostitutes or talking about frequenting prostitutes...or whether he is simply generalizing and using an example that takes the Corinthian behavior and extends it out in some sort of absurd, exaggerated manner.<sup>11</sup> Look at the second half of verse 15.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 6:15b**...Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> 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." <sup>17</sup> But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him

Do you see what Paul has done? He has taken the idea of the spiritual union we have with Christ and simply thought through the implications of what that means. He is saying that whenever a Christian, a person united to Christ through Christ's death and redemptive work in their behalf, unites themselves to a prostitute they are, in fact, uniting that prostitute to one of the members of Christ. Listen to how Alfred Martin puts it.

When a person becomes a believer, he is joined to the Lord Jesus Christ as "one spirit with Him" (6:17). Consequently, the believer must consider not only the effect of this conduct on himself, but also on the Lord. The repeated command in regard to sexual temptation is not to trifle with it, and certainly not to indulge it, but to run away from it. **"Flee sexual immorality."**

The realization that one is joined to the Lord Jesus ought to be the strongest incentive to avoid an illicit sexual connection of any kind (6:15). The translation of *me genoito* as "God forbid" in xiv seems to get closer to the original in expressing the unmitigated horror of doing any such thing ...<sup>12</sup>

And if that is not clear enough, listen to how Ben Witherington puts it.

Paul proceeds in verse 15 to say that each Christian's body is in a sense attached to Christ as a limb or member of him. It is a contradiction in terms to take one of Christ's limbs and attach it to a prostitute. Paul believes that more than a physical coupling happens when one has sexual intercourse with a prostitute. There is also a spiritual bonding, which is diametrically opposed to the union in one spirit that believers have with Christ (v. 16).<sup>13</sup>

You see Paul is drawing his argument to a conclusion here...and his argument has been a simple one...we are not free to involve ourselves in sexual immorality in the same way that we are free to eat whatever we want. Some things are transitory in nature and simply do not matter; other things have eternal, spiritual implications and do matter...and one of those things is sexual purity.

Listen to Calvin:

Hence Paul says now, "**There is a difference between *fornication* and *meats*, for the Lord has not ordained the body for fornication, as he has the belly for meats.**" And this he confirms from things contrary or opposite, inasmuch as it is consecrated to Christ, and it is impossible that Christ should be conjoined with fornication. What he adds — *and the Lord for the body*, is not without weight, for while God the Father has united us to his Son, what wickedness there would be in tearing away our body from that sacred connection, and giving it over to things unworthy of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Now in verse 18, Paul draws to his final conclusion.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:18**...Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Now the allusion is based on the story of Joseph. You all remember that wonderful Old Testament story about Joseph and Potiphar's wife where she

grabbed hold of him and tried to woo him and begged him to sleep with her and Joseph, wanting to be faithful to his master, took off running...and when Potiphar's wife held on to him he came out of his clothes and ran off as fast as he could.

What Paul is saying is that we ought to flee from immorality...flee just like Joseph...and the reason that we ought to do so is because sexual immorality is the one sin that we commit against our own bodies...in other words, when we commit sexual immorality we are committing a sin that goes beyond a moment of lust...we are permanently damaging our minds and our emotions and we are damaging those that we love by hurting our own ability to love as we ought.

Every time I think about this great truth I think about two very specific examples:

A few years ago, I was involved in the wedding of one of my ex-students. She was a lovely girl and she married a young man with whom she attended church. Let's call her Linda.

When I counseled Linda and her fiancé and they openly admitted that they had been sexually active. Anyway, they got married and for awhile their marriage progressed along with no more than the usual bumps that newlyweds face.

Eventually, Linda called me and told me that her husband had begun to take less and less interest in her. He seldom wanted to show affection and when he did it was clearly for his own gratification. Then one day, she was putting away some of his clothes and found a stack of pornographic magazines.

She confronted him about the magazines and he had the nerve to tell her that he used them as a motivation to bring them closer together. She threw the fit that she should have and she made him throw away the magazines.

A few months later, they went through the process all over again. Later, her husband became progressively less and less able to show her any affection at all. She knew he was using pornography again. They underwent counseling but in the end he refused to give it up. He and Linda separated and were eventually divorced.

Almost three years to the day after he and Linda were married, her husband killed himself. When they found his body, he was lying on his bed in a flop-house with a gun in one hand and a pornographic magazine in the other.

Now, I tell you that not just to warn you of the dangers of pornography but rather to illustrate for you the destructive nature of immorality and impurity. Here was a young couple with their whole lives before them destroyed because of a husband's obsession with fantasy and because of his inability to see that his actions were damaging him and those he loved.

But...whenever I think about these things I also think about another story. I think about one of my dear old friends a precious, godly woman named Carol. I remember once eating in the lunchroom when I was working at Joshua's. There was a group of three or four ladies engaged in some serious conversation. Carol was one of those ladies. One of the girls in the group had gotten involved in a sinful relationship and Carol was encouraging her to turn from her sin and to do what was right. This young girl looked at Carol and said, "**Really Carol what do**

**you know about sin. You live an impeccable life. You are wise and intelligent and so lady-like. You don't know what its like to be a sinner."**

I remember Carol smiled and then she leaned down pretty close to the girl and said, **"You know what. I used to be a drug addict. I've done heroin, cocaine, speed, you name it. I've been married more times than I like to admit. I've slept around and the truth of the matter is that whatever sophistication you see whatever godliness you see, you see because Jesus covered over all my sins and gave me a new heart and a new desire for righteousness. I would give anything if I could back and undo some of the things I've done because it does matter...I promise you it does...and I promise you that He fill that gigantic hole in your heart if you'll let Him."**

Finally Paul wraps up his argument in verses 19 and 20.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 6:19**...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, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Now I want to close with the simplest thing...something written by John Piper...something I think is wonderfully profound and closely related to what we have been talking about.

Friday morning I looked out the bedroom window as I was buttoning my shirt and saw a parable of modern American life. A middle aged man in a three piece green suit was walking westward toward our house on the north side of 18th Street. He had something yellow in his right hand, perhaps a banana peel or potato chip bag. I couldn't tell. As he walked along he looked to his left across the street. Then he turned and looked behind him. And then he tossed the yellow thing over the fence by the freeway.

In that little episode there are at least two marks of secular American life. One is practical atheism. And the other is physical hedonism.

1. The freeway fence was on his right concealing him with bushes. He could see to the front as he walked. The ground was underneath. And he covered himself to the left and behind with a glance.

Why didn't he look up? Because at that moment he was a practical atheist. There might have been someone to the left or behind that mattered. But there was no one in heaven that mattered. American life is by and large atheistic when it comes to bananas and potato chips. What people say is not what shows their practical atheism. It's whether they look up when they think they are alone.

2. The other mark of American life I saw was physical hedonism. Why did this fellow want to throw the yellow thing away instead of carrying it to a can? Because it was inconvenient to carry. It was annoying, unpleasant.

But why did he look over his shoulder before he tossed it? Because his conscience told him it was an action that is not good and that people would disapprove. So a minor skirmish went on in his soul. It lasted about five seconds. "Shall I opt for the pleasure of not carrying this thing? Or shall I opt for the pleasure of a clear conscience?" It clearly was not much of a battle. The physical pleasure won out. And that is another mark of our culture. Physical hedonism. If it feels good to your body why deny yourself? The curse of our culture is that physical pleasures are desired more strongly than spiritual joy.

And of course the two things go together: practical atheism and physical hedonism. Once God is out of the picture, then my conscience has no ultimate significance as a part of God's image, and so "Let us eat drink and litter the freeway, for tomorrow we die—and that's it." If you can just keep God out of the bananas and potato chips of your life, then you can proceed with your indulgences.<sup>15</sup>

But you can't, of course. God is God even of our chips.

When I think about that and how clear that is, I think about the folly of a man saying, **"You know it is perfectly alright, if I sit in my study late at night and cruise the internet. There is nothing I can see that will damage me. I am above such things."**

Brothers, it just ain't so.

We have an obligation to keep ourselves pure and clean both because of our connection to Christ and because we want to be good lovers. And ladies it is the same for you. The saddest thing I have come to see in the last few years of biblical counseling is that women are quickly becoming just as rotten as the men. And that's a shame.

When women slip and slide, the culture slips and slides.<sup>16</sup> And the reason our culture is so course today is because women are no longer willing to say, "You know I am not going to put up with that." Oh that that God would give us a heart for purity...for holiness...and teach us again that we are not our own but that we are bought with a price.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> With apologies to John Piper.

<sup>2</sup> Will Deming, "The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5-6" in the Journal of Biblical Literature 115.2 (Summer 1996). The gist of Deming's article is that the two chapters are connected...the lawsuit is a result of the sexual immorality...which does not to my way of thinking adequately explain 6:12-20.

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia, "Adiaphora." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adiaphora> (Ancient Greek ἀδιάφορα "indifferent things"; German "Mitteldinge" "middle matters") refers to matters not regarded as essential to faith, but are nevertheless permissible for Christians or allowed in church. What is specifically considered adiaphora depends on the specific theology in view.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians NICNT*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1987), 251. He continues... Everything is permissible for me is almost certainly a Corinthian theological slogan. This is confirmed by the way Paul cites it again in 10:23: in both cases he qualifies it so sharply as to negate it—

<sup>5</sup> <sup>KJV</sup> Exodus 20:14...Thou shalt not commit adultery.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary to First Corinthians* in Calvin's Commentaries Volume XX (Baker Book

House: Grand Rapids, 1981), 138.

<sup>7</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 167.

<sup>8</sup> F.W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT). (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), 144. Grosheide holds the opposite view, "The words: *all things are lawful for me*, must, as we feel compelled to assume, be taken as an expression of Paul's own opinion. The words which follow mention certain strictures to be true, but they do not nullify the former statement, since they belong to a different sphere. The reason why these limitations do not do away with the truth of the initial proverb is that the latter only states what a person may do, not what he must do. Paul may well have used this slogan himself; in any case he did not think it to be an incorrect summary of his own preaching on morality."

<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 102.

<sup>10</sup> Fee, 255.

<sup>11</sup> Brian S. Rosner, "Temple Prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20" in *Novum Testamentum* 40.04, 336-351.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Martin, *First Corinthians*. (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1989), 64.

<sup>13</sup> Witherington, 168-9.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, 138.

<sup>15</sup> John Piper, "I Will Not Be Enslaved By Anything." A Sermon Preached September 1, 1985 from 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. <http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/85/090185.html> 8/12/2006

<sup>16</sup> R. G. Lee, "Payday Someday."