

360 Paul on Corinthian sex

A few years ago I found it really helpful when I studied Romans by ‘aerial surveillance’, and I’ve just done the same with 1 Corinthians – taken the wider view before dissecting verse by verse. First, I looked at The Bible Project’s summary – many find TBP’s videos *really* helpful – and I noted that almost a quarter (24%) of the book is about sex.

The Corinthian context was in many ways very similar to C21, where (misuse of) sex is very high on society’s agenda, so we’d better pay close attention. TBP sums up 5–7 as:

- (1) yes, we’re ‘free in Christ’, but that does *not* mean we can just do what we like;
- (2) Jesus died for our sins, including sexual misconduct – it leads to broken [relationships](#);
- (3) Jesus rose, and we too will be raised, so what we do with our bodies really matters.

Reading the three chapters, I was struck by the contrast between his list of ‘blindingly obvious’ sins and his ‘here’s what I think, but you must decide what’s right/wrong for you’. But this teaching is really important because sex is such a powerful force for good or ill: it can cement [relationships](#) and it can – all too easily – destroy them. And it’s all set in the context of what’s really important: [relationships](#) that help God’s kingdom to come.

Paul has some pragmatic advice in 7⁹: staying single means that you’re freer to work for God’s kingdom, ‘*But if you don’t have power over your passions, then get married. Much better to marry than to have desire smouldering away inside you.*’ (NTFE)

Now, if you hold the traditional teaching on gay sex – and maybe even think that church leaders should enforce it – I would ask you to zoom out from the few words about ‘homosexuals’ within that list of blindingly obvious sins (6⁹⁻¹⁰); try to apply the *whole* of 5–7, to help the gay folk in your church to know how best to further God’s kingdom.

If they feel that it would not be right for them to fulfil their sexual desires, and that they should remain single, *we must affirm them in their decision as to what is right for them.*

But they may see: (the Bible’s teaching on the centrality of faithful [relationships](#)) + (their sexual desires) + (Paul’s practical advice above) and feel that, for them, it might be right to follow their hearts and risk falling in love, with a view to a possible lifelong commitment; and *we must affirm them in their decision as to what is right for them.* It won’t be an easy decision, and the last thing they need is to feel judged (to be judged!) by others.

Finally, when you look at that list of blindingly obvious sins of 6^{9,10}, do relate it to 5–7.

Do you not know that [the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God](#)? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor [homosexual offenders](#) nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers [will inherit the kingdom of God](#).

NTFE takes a *really* hard line: ‘[practising homosexuals of whichever type](#)’ ... will [not] inherit the kingdom of God. For once, I totally disagree with Tom Wright!