

## ANYTHING GOES

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 is a passage that talks a lot about sexual behaviour, but before we get to that subject we need to begin with what Paul is saying at the very start in v12.

The old way in which people related to God was through the Law. Thousands of little (and BIG) dos and don'ts were provided for people to help them navigate through life. Apparently God's greatest interest was in whether you kept the rules, and of course there were so many of them that nobody really did.

Well, Jesus changed all that. Jesus let people understand that God was more like a loving mum or dad than an unrelenting judge. And according to Jesus, our life was meant to be lived to the full. It was no longer a case of trying to measure up to some impossible standard or desperately trying to keep all the rules for fear of being thrown away by God.

To put it bluntly, God doesn't want a relationship with us that is dependent on rules and scores and measuring up.

How would we know where we stood with God?  
What would God's criteria be for accepting or rejecting us?

For example, take Margaret McCulloch. She's a really good person on the whole. God's been keeping a record. I was just looking at it to see her current score. Apparently today she's standing at 71%  
Or take Stuart Moffat. He's a much more dodgy character. He supports Hearts. That loses him points right there. He's down to 58%

What would all of this mean?  
Are both of these people accepted or not?  
Where's the cut off?  
Do you need to get more than 50%? Or more than that? Or less?

It all adds up to a crazy system.

This is not what God is like. God doesn't keep files on us - any more than any sane parent keeps files on their children and tots up scores.

Only Santa does stuff like that.

When we are small kids we need rules to protect us from all kinds of dangers and mistakes. Sometimes our parents will make rules without us understanding fully the reason for the rules.

But as we get older we begin to understand more – we learn to stand on our own feet and work out our own decisions.

As we grow, any relationship that is based on rules is not the most healthy or positive of relationships.

God wants us to be free to live life to the full. We are free from thousands of rules. We are free to make our own choices.

Marriage isn't based on laws.

Friendships aren't based on dos and don'ts.

Parenting isn't based on scoring charts and numbers.

This is all good news.

But it's quite a small step from this to making an obvious mistake.

It is a small step to then conclude – that if there are no rules we can all do whatever we want without restriction.

Anything goes.

This is where Paul comes in. This is what our reading is about. He's trying to say much the same thing.

God isn't looking over us with a book of rules to watch us slip up.

Yes, we are free to make our own choices in life.

Yes, we are no longer operating under some kind of Law.

But that doesn't mean that there aren't good choices and bad choices.

That doesn't mean there isn't right and wrong.

That doesn't mean God doesn't care what we do and how we live.

So Paul weighs in with verse 12.

*"Someone will say, I am allowed to do anything. Yes, but not everything is good for you."*  
(1 Cor 6:12)

Now if you are old enough, maybe you have heard this verse in the AV version of the Bible.

*"All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient."*

*Expedient* – a good word - means 'helpful' or 'useful'.

In other words, we can choose freely but that doesn't mean that one choice is as good as the other.

If I live in the south side of Glasgow, and I want to visit you at your home in Stirling, there is no law that says I cannot drive to Ardrrossan and onto the Brodick Ferry. I am free to do that if I want.

There is no law that says I can't go from Glasgow to Stirling via Arran, but it's a pretty stupid decision that will make my journey longer and it makes no sense.

There is no law that says I need to keep putting petrol in my car, but if I don't do it, I'll not be going far.

Actually, to tell the truth, my car is diesel!

There is no law that says I can't put petrol in **it** – but if I do then it will break down and I risk doing serious damage to the engine.

There is no law that says that I can't smoke 200 cigarettes a day, but if I do so I will be damaging my health and probably creating an addiction.

There is no law that says I can't tell lies to my friends, but if I do that, I may find that I've got less friends and nobody really trusts me.

*There is no law against ignoring all my wife's interests and wishes, but if I want our relationship to grow and deepen, then it would be the wrong choice. And similarly, if I want to grow closer to God and deepen my union with Christ, then there are choices that are good and beneficial and there are choices which would undermine the thing I am saying I want. There are no laws to comply with to earn the relationship, there are just relationship-friendly choices and relationship-harming choices.*

(Nathan Nettleton: No Laws, January 2009)

Someone in the early church started arguing like this.

If we are set free from all the rules and regulations of the past then we can just do whatever we want.

Hunger is a basic human instinct. If we don't have to follow dietary commands then we can eat whatever food we want.

Sex is a basic human instinct too. So if we are free to choose we are free to engage in sexual behaviour - whenever and with whomever we want.

In other words, when it comes to sexual behaviour – anything goes.

*"No way is that true!" says Paul. "Because some things are destructive- some things are harmful."*

And of course, in this, Paul is clearly right.

In our church we oppose homophobia and support inclusiveness. We believe that every person (whatever their sexual orientation) should have the possibility of being in a committed sexual relationship with someone they love.

And our opponents often use pretty harsh words to condemn us and suggest that we have lost touch with what is right and wrong. But accepting the rights of gay people does not mean we condone all sexual behaviour and does not mean we condone promiscuity.

Our sexualities are a gift from God. And it is possible to use that gift in positive life-affirming ways as well as negative, destructive ways.

When we use sex as a weapon,  
 when we play on the emotions of others,  
 when we use people for ourselves,  
 when we think of it casually – as a kind of sport - then we cheapen this gift.  
 When we think of sex as an act in itself, devoid of a mutual, trusting and loving relationship we cheapen it.

And when we embark on relationships that exploit someone else,  
 which involve deceit and the breaking of promises and trust,  
 then we are using the gift selfishly and for our own interests.  
 When we risk the breakup of homes and families and the heartache that follows  
 then we are acting destructively.

Paul says we are set free – to be the people that we are called to be.  
 And if we are truly followers of Jesus that has to affect all of us –  
 our bodies as well as our minds,  
 our hearts as well as our thinking,  
 our actions as well as our words.

As Paul says, our bodies cannot be one with Christ and one with a prostitute at the same time.

Our choices follow from who we are.  
 If we are serious about our faith – if we are serious about wanting to follow Christ and live as followers of Jesus then that will impact on our choices.  
 In other words, we cannot claim Christ on Sunday morning and live with different values throughout the rest of the week.  
 Our choices need to be consistent with who we are.

God is trusting us and counting on us to make good choices – ones which lead to better life, which are based on mutual respect and not selfish advantage, and ones which make most sense.

We live in a world of infinite choices and opportunities.  
 But not everything makes sense for us.  
 Not everything is a good choice for us.  
 Not everything is what God would want us to do.

You know I think there's maybe another kind of choice that we face.  
 Not between good and bad – between right and wrong.  
 Rather a choice between two good possibilities.  
 Often that's the choice we face.

What is our career path?  
 Will we take this job?  
 Will we move here – or there?

It's not about morals – it's about two competing ideas that both have merit.  
Or maybe between more than two things – all perfectly good in themselves.

That's where we often need Gods help to decide.

This happens in church all the time.

We are not going to be tempted to open up a centre for selling drugs to underage kids, or trying to sell off stolen goods.

A church might decide to open a project for youth work for example. That would be a good thing.

But if there are hardly any kids in the area and lots of single older people who are shut in their homes, then maybe addressing *that* need might be more important.

Or take a retiral collection.

We could have a special collection after our service today. But what for?

The Ebola appeal?

What about Syrian Refugees?

What about the Lodging House Mission in Glasgow nearer home?

Or Foodbanks?

How about Amnesty?

There are hundreds (thousands) of possibilities.

And they are all deserving causes. And we can't do everything.

All we can do is ask God to guide us as we make our choices.

We are free to make those choices. There are no set rules.

But as Christians we ask God to help us in the choices we make

so that the things we do

with our money,

with our time,

with our bodies,

with our efforts – the things we commit to –

are worthy of Gods call on our lives.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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