

**1 Corinthians 6:12 - 7:1** <sup>12</sup> "Everything is permissible for me"-- but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"-- but I will not be mastered by anything. <sup>13</sup> "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"-- but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup> By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. <sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." { 16 Gen. 2:24} <sup>17</sup> But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. <sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

### **"Making Christian Decisions"**

One of the new species of alien in the Star Trek's that didn't involve Captain Kirk and Spock is the Ferengi. They are probably the ugliest aliens anyone has ever come up with. They are short and have great big bulbous bum-shaped heads that are rimmed by a uni-brow that becomes their earlobes and their teeth are very sharp fangs which are an orthodontic nightmare that they are frequently seen rather vainly sharpening with a tooth-file. To make matters worse, Ferengi men think they are God's gift to women of all humanoid species. Simply said, they are disgusting littleimps.

The Ferengi are rather flat characters in Star Trek meaning they have only one defining characteristic: everything they do is motivated by financial profit. They are uber-capitalists. Their society is a free market economy gone to the extreme. The only law they have are the 285 Rules of Acquisition. For them, the good person is the most profitable person. Their lust for profit is so extreme that pregnancy is simply a matter of renting space. Their religion is even based on profit and resembles the Christian *Prosperity Gospel*. What happens to a person in the after-life is determined by how much profit one made in this life. The successful go to the Divine or Golden Treasury and failures go to the Vault of Eternal Destitution or the Debtor's Dungeon.

In the big picture, the Ferengi are a parody of Westerners and the free market economy. In fact, the name Ferengi is derived from the Arabic word for European traders or Westerners in general. They are supposed to be what human society would look like if benefit, usefulness, success, and even the Good were determined by financial worth.

The Ferengi teach us that there is more to life than turning a profit and they leave us asking what motives underlie how we determine what is best for us. We live in a culture that's quite selfish at this task. In High School I'm pretty sure that we all had to read Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Polonius' last words of advice to his son Laertes when leaving for France became the motto for many guidance counsellors: "This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must

follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.” The advice is to be honest with oneself. If you lie to yourself, you are a lie before all people. Being honest with yourself is good advice, but difficult to do. But, for some reason that’s not what we hear Polonius’ advice to be. We hear it as if I must do what seems best for me. I must do what makes me happy and that will be best for everyone. Unfortunately, living that way tends to leave behind us a wake of hurt people. Doing that is marginally ok when we’re young and out to conquer the world, but once commitments are made and there are people relying on us we have to start thinking about what’s best not for me, but for us.

In this passage from 1 Corinthians Paul pushes us in that direction and leads us to determine what is beneficial for me by determining what is best for the Christian community of which I am a part. He says, “All things are permissible for me’ – but not everything is beneficial. ‘All things are permissible for me’ – but I myself will not be enslaved by anything.” Paul is here taking a common phrase that was frequently used in the early church in the dispute over whether or not eating meat sacrificed to idols was permissible. In fact, it was near impossible to buy meat in the marketplace that hadn’t been sacrificed to one god or another. The Jewish Christian part of the church had a huge problem with eating marketplace meat. On the other hand, the Gentile Christians didn’t see anything wrong with ate ate the meat and coined the phrase, “All things are permissible or lawful for me”.

Well, Paul picks up on that and runs with it. The New Testament Greek word for “beneficial” is *symphero*. It is often translated as profitable or to one’s advantage. Yet, quite literally it means “to with-bring” or “to bring together”. This verse really ought to read, “All things are permissible for me” – but not everything promotes community”. He follows that up with “yes, all things are permissible for me” – but if we get carried away with it there is an awful lot out there that will become master of us.” The point of his argument is that we have to do what’s best for building up our Christian community. To make the case even stronger, Paul says as much in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, where he says: “Everything is permissible’-- but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible’-- but not everything builds up. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.”

That’s well and good. But, I can’t leave matters at that. Paul next takes an interesting turn and starts talking about something which in Greek is called *porneia* from which we get our word pornography. Most translations render it as fornication. Our Pew Bibles broadly translate it as sexual immorality which I won’t argue with but it didn’t come to that broad of a meaning until about 150 years after Paul. To be true to Paul’s time, he was talking about fornication, which is sexual relations outside of marriage, and I would particularize that with saying it most likely involved temple prostitution.

Now, sometimes when you read Paul, it seems like he jumps from “point A” to “point B” and left something out in the way of transition that you’re just supposed to know. Unfortunately, it leaves us guessing. What seems to be happening here is that Paul is turning the pointer back around to those Gentile Christians who were in the right when it came to eating meat from the marketplace but who also were in the wrong when it comes to matters of sexual

conduct. He's pointing out that not "everything" is permissible; fornication for example. Just because you can eat meat sacrificed to idols doesn't mean you can also go have sexual relations with prostitutes at the temples of those idols. The reason he gives for this is brilliant. He doesn't hammer sex as being bad. Rather, he says that since the Holy Spirit is in us we each are members, body parts of the body of Christ. Our collective body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are not our own and what we do with our bodies should bring glory to God. So, since we are united in the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ we need to make our decisions according to what is best for building up Christ's body.

Paul presents us here with a very radical paradigm for how we make decisions about our lives. We are not our own. We belong to Jesus Christ who bought us his slaves at the cost of his own life. Therefore, in all matters we are to do what is best for the body of believers with whom we are growing together in Christ. Let's flesh this out a bit starting with me the minister.

What if I were to receive an offer to go and minister to a congregation that would pay \$20,000 more a year as well as give me a housing allowance with which Dana and I could purchase a house. Most people would say, "That's a no-brainer. Take it." It would be good for me career-wise for it puts me in a bigger pulpit. It would be good for my family financially; although the requirements on my time would pull me away from them. But, if I am to take Paul seriously on this any such move on my part would have to involve a consultation with you folks concerning what is best for you and the greater church. Career move and financial incentive is not enough reason for a minister to move on. What is best for the body of Christ, for building it up is the determinate.

The same is true for all of you. According to Paul what is best for building up this worshipping community is supposed to be the determining factor in all our decisions from how we use our lives in retirement, to family matters, to career moves, to kids in sports, even to matters involving morals. We are a temple of the Holy Spirit. We are each body parts of the body of Christ. Christ Jesus has bought us at the price of his own life. Our lives are not our own anymore.

Jesus has blessed us with having a praying community of devoted Christians to consult with respect to the important stuff of our lives, people through whom he will speak if we give him opportunity. To bring a matter before the LORD is to bring it before our brothers and sisters in Christ that prayerfully we may speak the things of God to one another and lean on the godly wisdom that the Holy Spirit has wrought in us each. God has not left us in this world to fend for ourselves nor to do what simply feels right to me in my gut. God wants to direct us down his pathways that he might bless us. Praise be to God. What a beautiful thing this is. Amen.