

Joined to the Lord

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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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. ¹³ "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. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 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! ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 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. 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, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

There is a vast difference between the biblical world and our own, a significant gap in culture and time. Usually this means that we have to work pretty hard to understand Scripture within its cultural context. Today, for example, if God spoke to you and told you to take a heifer, a goat, and a ram, and cut them in half, you would most certainly be confused. But when God tells Abraham just this in Genesis 15, Abraham understands that this is how covenants were made, and that God is making a covenant with him. Again, if you at some point today lovingly told your wife that "your belly is a heap of wheat," as Solomon said to his beloved in Song of Solomon 7:2, she most likely won't take kindly to what you said. But in Ancient Israel those words stoked the romantic fire.

There is usually a significant gap between the biblical world and our own, but in our passage today that gap does not exist. On this particular issue, sexual immorality, our world today virtually mirrors that of ancient Corinth, so it is very easy for us to enter into the Corinthian world and understand quite clearly what Paul has to say.

Both ancient Corinth and our world are saturated in sexual sin. Ancient Corinth was a sea-side town, a major city, and with its prosperity and location it served as a major hub for all kinds of sexual deviations. Already Paul has had to address the problem of incest in the Corinthian church. Here Paul deals specifically with prostitution, but probably he also has in mind all forms of sexual sin, promiscuity, adultery, and fornication. Sexual sin was so prevalent in Corinth that over time a word was coined highlighting this reality. To "Corinthianize" meant "to go to a prostitute."¹

Like ancient Corinth, our own world is saturated in sexual sin. Today it is impossible to check out at the grocery store without being bombarded with all manners of sexual deviation in the tabloids and magazines on display. Today the pornography

industry thrives; sex outside of marriage is celebrated; and promiscuity, homosexuality, and complete sexual freedom are increasingly considered basic human rights.

Our sexually immoral culture mirrors that of ancient Corinth. In 2,000 years time, half a world away, things haven't changed. Indeed, we can look at any period in history and find pervasive sexual sin. Even when we read the Westminster Confession of Faith, written in Puritan England in the 1600's, we find the same perversions.

Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 139: What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behavior, immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life, undue delay of marriage; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.

Another way our modern world mirrors the Corinthian world is that sometimes Christians in both worlds sought to justify sexual sin. The Corinthian Christians boasted, "all things are lawful for me..." (v. 12). It was likely a common slogan for them. They unquestionably believed in Christian liberty, but they were distorting Christian liberty into a license to sin. They thought, "I'm a Christian... I'm forgiven... I'm under grace... therefore, I can do whatever I want." And that apparently included going to prostitutes.

Another of their slogans is found in v. 13, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food." This slogan, probably referring to their freedom from Jewish regulations, was now being used to justify sexual sin. That is, if food is for the stomach, and the stomach for food, then sex is for the body, and the body for sex. In other words, gratifying sexual appetites was not qualitatively different than strolling to the fridge for a snack.²

The Corinthian Christians were pretty good at justifying their sexual immorality. But today, Christians likewise do the same, even distorting Scripture to their own ends. It is common for some contemporary church leaders to suggest that the biblical language against homosexuality is only speaking against *promiscuous* homosexuality. These suggest that the Bible does not forbid monogamous homosexual relationships. Some Christian churches today say that as long as you are in a *committed* homosexual relationship, you can still be a minister in Christ's church. This is a clear distortion of God's Word to serve the sinful desires of man. It is the same as saying, "All things are lawful for me."

Here we must note that as Paul speaks of sexual immorality, he is not addressing the world, he is talking to the church. In other words, he is talking to you and me, as Christians. Without question there are people here today who are struggling right now

with some form of sexual sin. It could be anything from pornography, to lust, to homosexuality, to premarital sex. And without question all of us have in some way been affected by sexual sin at some point in our lives. None of us are untouched by what Paul speaks of here. So, our first priority this morning is not to take this passage to the world, but straight to our own hearts and minds.

Here Paul offers us two forms of help: a commandment and its theological grounds.

The Commandment: Flee Sexual Immorality

The commandment is very simple. "Flee sexual immorality" (v. 18). Run away from it. Like Joseph with Potiphar's wife, don't stick around to even entertain the possibility. Do everything you can do to fight sexual temptation. Do not toy with it. Do not dabble in it. Do not allow your mind to go down roads it ought not. Do not look at things you ought not. Do not put yourself in situations you ought not be in.

This may, of course, require extreme action. You may have magazines you need to get rid of. You may have to block certain television channels. You may need accountability software for your computer. If you are single, young, dating, engaged to be married... don't have sex. Don't put yourself in a situation in which you may go too far.

How far is too far? If you are asking that question it is likely that you have gone too far. Paul instructs young men to treat young women as sisters, in all purity (1 Tim. 5:2). That's the rule. Until you are married, treat her like your sister.

If you are married, it is God's intention that 100 percent of your sexual desires and energies and actions be directed toward your spouse. Women, your ideal man is, by definition, the man you are married to. And vice versa. When everything is working right in our marriages, all of our desire is focused on one another.

So, whether single or married, you must take extreme action to flee sexual immorality. And no, this does not make you a prude. As we'll later see in 1 Corinthians 7, sex is a good, God-given gift to be enjoyed within the bounds of marriage. But, sexual immorality is dangerous and devastating in both temporal and eternal ways, and we are to flee from it.

The Theological Grounds for Fleeing Sexual Immorality

The commandment to "flee sexual immorality" is grounded in a healthy dose of biblical and theological truths about who God is and who we are as his people. So, when it comes to sex, there is an enormous theological weight that governs our sexual relationships. One of the Corinthians' first problems is that the basic theology which governs their sexual relationships is all askew.

When they say, "all things are lawful for me," Paul offers a two-fold correction, "but not all things are helpful," and, "but I will not be enslaved by anything" (v. 12). Paul points out that they think they are free, but the reality is that they are enslaved by their sexual desires.

In v. 13 the Corinthians seem to suggest that they believe both food and stomach will be destroyed by God. They reason, then, that since they will be destroyed, how they

have sex and with whom they have sex is no big deal. Ultimately, in their minds, both sex and the body will be destroyed. On this point some of the Corinthians seem to be retaining Gnostic-like tendencies. That is, they deny the significance of the body, and focus instead on spiritual matters. The result is that they believe there is no resurrection, and since our bodies are only temporary homes for the soul, then we have license to do whatever we want with our bodies. To all of this Paul responds with a slogan of his own, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (v. 13).

We see here five theological truths to guide our sexual relationships.

First, our bodies are for the Lord. The Corinthians thought that their bodies were of no spiritual or eternal significance. They promoted a kind of hyper-spirituality. Some rejected the significance of all things physical and material. For them this meant they could indulge in all manners of immorality, simply because the body doesn't matter. So Paul responds, "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power" (vv. 13-14). His point is that the body will not be destroyed. Instead, our bodies, these same bodies which clothe us now, will be raised up.

The biblical teaching is that heaven will be a physical place, not merely some kind of disembodied spiritual existence. Therefore, not just our souls, but your very bodies exist ultimately for the Lord. Everything, from eating to sex, must be done in the body for the Lord.

I am reminded of one of my college professors who used to say that the sex act, within the bounds of marriage, is such a beautiful thing that it would be appropriate for the "Hallelujah Chorus" to be played in the background. Indeed, if our bodies are for the Lord, then even sex itself is for the Lord in some sense. And, anything short of God's intended purposes for sex is a grievous distortion.

Second, Paul reminds the Corinthians that our union is with Christ, therefore we ought not be united with another in sexual immorality. He says in vv. 15-17:

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! 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." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

For Christians there is the wonderful doctrine of "union with Christ" that ought to literally define who we are and how we live in this world. We are united with Jesus through faith. It is a real spiritual union. We celebrate that union every Sunday at the Lord's table. We live under the benefits of that union. Because we have Christ, God looks upon us with favor. He declares us to be righteous. We are his holy people, set apart from the world for his holy purposes.

Because we are united with Christ, we simply cannot be united with prostitutes or with others in sexual immorality. Jesus is with us and in us, and we are in him. Therefore we must flee sexual immorality.

Third, Paul tells us that sexual immorality is a sin against one's own body. In v. 18 he says, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside

the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body." Roger Ellsworth puts it this way:

If you have a beautiful car and break the speed limit with it, you have sinned in the car but not against it. If you used your beautiful car to haul garbage in, you would be sinning against the car. That would be a desecration of the car because it would violate the purpose for which the car was made. That is exactly what sexual sin does to the body since the body belongs to the Lord.³

Fourth, Paul tells us that we ought to flee sexual immorality because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. He writes, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?" (v. 19).

Here we are reminded of our eternal end. I think of the great worship scene around the throne of God in Revelation 4 as the angelic beings cry out day and night without ceasing, "Holy, holy, holy" (Rev. 4:8). This is our eternal end, to stand before God and declare to him, "Holy, holy, holy." And because right now our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and because we commune with God through Christ right now, this is also our end today, and tomorrow, and when you are tempted by pornography, and when you are alone with your boyfriend. "Holy, holy, holy."

Our very bodies exist, not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord (v. 13), for union with Christ (vv. 15-17), and to be temples of the Holy Spirit (v. 19). Here we have every member of the Trinity represented to emphasize how thoroughgoing the call to flee sexual immorality actually is.

Fifth, and finally, we must flee sexual immorality because our bodies are not ultimately our own. "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (vv. 19-20).

Sometimes we may think that our redemption is merely a spiritual matter. But this is not so. Jesus came to earth as a man, with flesh and blood. He died on the cross as a man, with a broken body and shed blood. He was raised in the flesh. We ought not make an easy distinction between body and spirit, for ultimately they are inseparable. When Jesus died and rose again in the flesh, he did so that we might ourselves be raised in the flesh, and that we might this very day, in our flesh, glorify God with our bodies.

Ultimately we are told, "Glorify God in your body." Why? Because our bodies are for the Lord. Because we are united through faith to Christ. Because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. And ultimately because our bodies are not our own. We are God's. He has bought us, even our bodies, at a very great price!

Forgiveness for Sexual Sin

We began by acknowledging that each of us is in some way affected by sexual sin. We close with the reminder that forgiveness for sexual sin is abundantly available. When Jesus spoke to the woman caught in adultery in John 8, his final words to her were, "'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.'"

Indeed, her sin was most serious. Under the Old Testament provisions of the law, she should have been stoned. But Jesus did not condemn her, because he stood

condemned in her place. She experienced first-hand the glorious reality of the gospel. Condemned to die, but saved by Christ, her substitute.

Friends, I hope that you too know Christ as your savior and your substitute.

¹ Richard Ganz, *Twenty Controversies That Almost Killed a Church* (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003), 82.

² Roger Ellsworth, *Strengthening Christ's Church* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 1995), 109.

³ *Ibid.*, 112.