



## **THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY (PART 2)** **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6 and take out the notes you received in the Worship Guide when you came in. Today, we begin Part 2 of “The Cross and Christian Sexuality.”

Just as a reminder, we’ve labeled this week’s sermon and last week’s sermon PG-13, because we are talking specifically and explicitly about sexuality and sexual sin. I had some people tell me last week that they thought it was going to be more graphic, and they wished their children had been here. I had others tell me that they wish their children were not here, so I don’t know what to tell you. If you look down the notes here, including the insert in your Worship Guide, you’ll get a pretty good idea of where we’re going. If you’d rather not get some of the questions and conversations that might come from your children at this point, then feel free to go ahead and take your children to children’s ministry. Just go out into the lobby, and they can direct you there.

If you’re listening to this on podcast with your kids in the car, just be warned. If you’re visiting with us today, whether you are a Christian from another church or maybe you’re not a Christian, know that we don’t talk every week about masturbation and pornography. We’re walking through the book of 1 Corinthians in the Bible, a letter written to a church in a sex-crazed culture in the first century, and there are so many applications of this Word to our sex-crazed culture in the twenty-first century.

### **The central exhortation: Flee sexual immorality.**

Let’s recap where we were last week. In the passage we are in—1 Corinthians 6:12-20—the central exhortation is: Flee sexual immorality. Let’s go ahead and read the passage again to make sure we have the context. This is our base text this morning, but we’re going to zoom out from here for most of our time together to see what the Bible as a whole teaches us about sexuality. This is Paul’s specific effort here with the church at Corinth to show these new believers an entirely new sexual ethic that was centered, not around self-gratification, but God-glorification.

Follow along with me. Since we started last week in verse 9, let’s go ahead and do that again. 1 Corinthians 6:9,

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 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.*

*"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "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. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 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. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 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, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:9-20)*

The central exhortation there in verse 18 is clear: Flee sexual immorality. Don't reason with sexual immorality; don't rationalize it. Run from it. Flee it as fast as you can.

**The biblical clarification: Flee sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman.**

Last week, we talked about what sexual immorality is, and it's in your notes. When the Bible says to flee sexual immorality, the Bible is saying to flee any and all sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

That's the word for sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians 6:18: "*porneia*." "*Porneia*" is a general term for any sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman, so that includes any and all fornication, prostitution, pornography, adultery, homosexual activity and any and all sexual thinking, desiring, looking, touching, speaking, acting outside of marriage between a man and a woman. All of these things are sin, and we are to run from them.

In a helpful book on holiness, Kevin DeYoung wrote, "The simplest way to understand '*porneia*' is to think about the things that would make you furious and heartbroken if you found out someone was doing them with your husband or your wife." So when you think about sexual immorality, think any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. That's the key. This is not at all to say that sex is bad, but that sex is good within the boundaries that God designed sex for.

You had the Corinthians then, just like Americans today, who were saying, "Two consenting adults. What's the problem? This is what my body was made for. I was created this way. Just like I eat because I'm hungry, I do this sexually because of my biology. So what makes that a sin? It's just who I am."

And Paul says, "No, it's not just who you are. Your body is not just about biology; your body is much more valuable than that. Your body has been created and designed by God for your good and for His glory. It's wise to listen to what God says about your body." God says as clearly as it's possible to say, "Sex is for marriage between a man and a woman. Any sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman is sin. It's sexual immorality, and you should flee it."

Now to most people in our culture, in our city, in our country, this is outlandish and offensive to call these things sin. To call fornication, homosexual activity, even adultery sin is seen as narrow-minded, arrogant, even hateful.

## **Supreme Court Reaction...**

I mentioned last week that we in no way planned this, but it is obviously providential that we would be in this text on the two Sundays surrounding the landmark court decisions in our country that were announced this last week. The Supreme Court of our country remanding the decision of the Ninth Circuit in the Proposition 8 case in California, effectively paving the way for the legalization of same-sex marriage in California, and then striking down DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act) as unconstitutional, which not only federally acknowledges same-sex marriages in various states across our country, but essentially paves the way for constitutional rights to same-sex marriage in every state in the days ahead.

At the top of your notes, I put just a few exhortations that I would give us as the church, springing, not just from this text, but other texts in Scripture, in light of what happened in our country this last week. So how are we to respond to what just happened in the Supreme Court?

### **It is good to be grieved...about the degradation (and supposed redefinition) of marriage.**

First, I would say to us as a church, as a faith family, that it is good to be grieved about the degradation (and supposed redefinition) of marriage that took place this last week. I'm not saying that "grief" is an enjoyable emotion in and of itself, and I'm not saying that this decision by the Supreme Court was a good decision by any means. Instead, what I'm saying is that if you're grieved by what happened this last week, that's a good thing. If you're not grieved by what happened this last week, then that's probably not a good thing, maybe even a bad thing.

The decision made by the Supreme Court of our country this last week goes fundamentally against the law of God and the design of God for marriage. To use language directly from the minority opinion in the court written by Judge Scalia, this decision undercuts "an aspect of marriage that [has] been unquestioned in our society for most of its existence—indeed, [has] been unquestioned in virtually all societies for virtually all of human history."

In the beginning (Genesis 2:24), God designed marriage as the one-flesh union of a man and a woman together, and God was not haphazard in designing marriage this way. He designed it this way for a purpose. Ephesians 5 tells us that God designed marriage specifically so that we would have a picture of His great love for His people through Christ's sacrificial love for His church. That's why we have marriage in the first place. To see that picture undercut by a Supreme Court is heartbreaking because it so goes against the design of God and the picture of the gospel and the glory of God in marriage. We should be grieved by this. And not just by this decision, but by the degradation of marriage across our culture and even in the church.

Yes, this week was significant, but this Supreme Court decision completely aside, we need to be grieved over all the ways marriage has been minimized and distorted in our culture

and our country and in the church—through divorce and through a singles culture that postpones marriage longer and longer and longer as if it's not that important. Marriage is important; it's extremely important. We need to be grieved over anything that threatens the institution of marriage in our lives, in the church, and across our country.

**It is right to be concerned...about religious liberty in our country.**

Second, it is right to be concerned about religious liberty in our country. My aim here is not to be an alarmist, but the reality is clear. The majority opinion written by Justice Kennedy in this case seemed to assert (rather strongly) that opposition to same-sex marriage is rooted in animus, hatred. Justices Roberts and Scalia both argued in their dissents that the majority court was painting supporters of traditional marriage as "bigots" and literally "enemies of the human race."

How could they, back in the 90s, come up with this 'Defense of Marriage Act'? The answer that the majority opinion gave is that people were acting with malice, with the purpose to disparage and to injure same-sex couples. Traditional marriage supporters sought to demean, to impose inequality, to impose a stigma, to deny people equal dignity, to brand gay people as unworthy, and to humiliate their children. This is striking language that was used this last week to categorize anybody who supports biblical marriage.

As a result, I'm convinced there will be ramifications of this decision when it comes to religious liberty and challenges ahead for churches and Christian institutions and even Christian business owners who hold to a biblical picture of marriage. We've already seen this in places like Massachusetts where, after same-sex marriage was legalized, Catholic Charities, one of the foremost (if not the foremost) institutions working for foster care and adoption in that state, was virtually shut down because they refused to place foster or adoptive children with families that didn't consist of a husband and a wife, a mom and a dad. That's just one example. There are a variety of others. The point is, I think we would be foolish not to realize that proclamation of God's Word and living out the implications of God's Word in our country is going to be harder, not easier in the coming days.

I put Romans 13:1-7 in parentheses there because, yes, we submit to our government and its purpose under God for the common good. At the same time, in the same vein as Peter and John in Acts 4, we cannot help but to speak this Word, no matter what it costs us. In the words of a "Manhattan Declaration" that I and a host of prominent religious leaders signed not long ago,

We will not bend to any rule purporting to force us to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriages or the equivalent, or refrain from proclaiming the truth, as we know it, about morality and immorality and marriage and the family. We will fully and ungrudgingly render to Caesar what is Caesar's. But under no circumstances will we render to Caesar what is God's (Matthew 22:21).

**It is imperative to be loving...toward our gay and lesbian friends and neighbors.**

Third, it is imperative to be loving toward our gay and lesbian friends and neighbors. We must be careful, church, not to look at our gay and lesbian friends and neighbors as enemies, a part of some conspiracy against us. They are friends and neighbors who are seeking a way that seems right to them. Just as they are turning aside from God's way, we are all prone to do the same. We talked about this last week. We are all sexual sinners (homosexual and heterosexual alike), and we all need a Savior. So love your gay and

lesbian neighbors, not as your enemies, but as your friends, and lead them patiently to see the love of God for them and the desire of God for their good, not just now, but forever.

**It is wise to be confident...in the resiliency of marriage, in the opportunity for the gospel, and in the sovereignty of our God.**

Which leads to this last reaction: It is wise to be confident in the resiliency of marriage. In Matthew 19, Jesus said marriage has been around since the beginning, and in Revelation 19, marriage will be around until the end. Marriage is a picture that will represent our union with Christ in heaven forever, so don't worry about whether or not marriage is going to make it. The reality is that we don't look to any court or any state legislature to define marriage. God has already defined it, and God's definition of it can't be eradicated by a vote of legislators or nine Supreme Court justices. There is a supreme Judge who has defined marriage once and for all.

Be confident in the resiliency of marriage and in the opportunity for the gospel. There's no question that this decision presents a huge opportunity for gospel witness. As spiritual darkness engulfs the picture of marriage in our culture, spiritual light is going to shine all the brighter in the picture of a husband who lays down his life for his wife and a wife who joyfully follows her husband's loving leadership. God's design for marriage is far more breathtaking and satisfying than anything we can create on our own, so let's give ourselves to His design. Let's let this moment drive us to revive our marriages across the church, so that the glory of God, the gospel, might be all the more clear in us during these days.

And it's wise to be confident in the sovereignty of our God. Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus is still alive. Jesus is still sovereign over all history, including what happened in the United States of America this last week. Things are not out of control. Ultimately, they are completely in control in the sovereign hands of the God who is working all things together for the good of those who love Him. Remember, biblical Christianity throughout history has always thrived most when it has been seen in sharp contrast to the culture around it. That was certainly true in Corinth, and that's why God's Word was calling the church then and there, and God's Word is calling the church here and now, to take extreme measures in order to flee sexual immorality.

I'll go ahead and warn you. What we're going to talk about today is going to sound entirely extreme to most of you—even many of you who are Christians—but I hope you will see it in the backdrop of the way the gospel distinctly calls us to live in this culture, and that under the sovereignty of God, you will carry out this Word with courage, no matter what it costs you, knowing that though these days are difficult, the opportunities for the gospel in and through your life are great.

## **Clear Sexual Prohibitions...**

Let's pick up where we left off last week. My goal last week, starting in 1 Corinthians 6 and then branching out to all of Scripture, was to see sexuality in light of the gospel and God's good design for sexuality. We talked a good bit about how God designed sex to be relational, covenantal, intimate, fruitful, selfless, complex, and complementary, all for our good and for His glory.

Flowing from that, I thought it would be helpful to give you a list of clear sexual prohibitions in Scripture. These are sexual things in Scripture that God specifically says: "Don't do this." I think this will help shed more light on the sexual immorality that we're supposed to flee, and it will also help us answer some questions below that sometimes we view as grey areas.

### **No sex outside of marriage.**

We saw that God has designed sexual activity to take place in the context of marriage between a man and a woman, and as a result, we see clear sexual prohibitions in Scripture, like no sex outside of marriage. Marriage is the God-given boundary defining the limits of sex. Marriage is like fire. If you keep it in the fireplace of marriage, it's a great thing. If you take out of the fireplace into the rest of your house, it's a bad thing.

Sex outside of marriage is sin—always—whether it happens before, during, or after marriage. The Bible is clear on this, with no questions or discussion. The Old Testament says it, Jesus says it, and the rest of the New Testament says it: No sex outside of marriage. Realize why this is! Remember, we said last week that sex is covenantal. Why? Because the Bible teaches us that marriage is a covenant that establishes a relationship between a man and a woman who are committing themselves to one another, and like all other covenants in the Bible, marriage as a covenant has a sign. The sign of God's covenant with Noah was a rainbow. The sign of God's new covenant with His church is baptism just like we celebrated earlier. This picture, this sign that represents the covenant between Christ and us. When you enter into the marriage covenant, what's the sign of that covenant? The sign is literally this physical act of becoming one flesh in sex.

Don't miss it. Sex is not just the reward for getting married. That would be like saying baptism is the reward for becoming a Christian. No, sex is the sign of the marriage covenant. Having sex with your wife or your husband (both that first time after you are married, and then every subsequent time after that) is a sign before God that you are in covenant with this person. As a result, having sex outside of marriage makes a mockery of that covenant and misses the whole point of sex in the first place. No sex outside of marriage.

### **No sexual worship.**

The second sexual prohibition in Scripture is no sexual worship. Sex is good, but sex is not God. Throughout the history of God's people—Deuteronomy 23, Exodus 32, 1 Corinthians 10—we see God's people falling into the trap of worshiping sex. It's happening today across our culture. There are so many people thinking, "If only I had sexual freedom in this way or that way, then I'd be happy." This, too, is a false god, a broken cistern that can't hold water. So, let's be there to say sex is not God. We don't worship the gift; we worship the Giver of the gift. No sexual worship.

### **No sexual prostitution.**

Third, no sexual prostitution. No sexual prostitution is made clear in Leviticus 19, Deuteronomy 23, and Proverbs 6. Scripture speaks clearly against all kinds of violence, which would include sadism, masochism, any kind of spousal abuse. Sex is not designed by God to be hurtful; it is designed to mirror the love relationship between Christ and His church (Ephesians 5), which sacrifices for one another's good. No sexual prostitution or violence.

### **No homosexual activity.**

Fourth, no homosexual activity. We talked about this last week. You have to deny Scripture altogether to miss this. Leviticus 18, Romans 1, and the whole of Scripture not only

condemns homosexual activity but never once exalts any kind of sexual activity that is not heterosexual between a man and a woman in the context of marriage. It is impossible to biblically justify homosexual activity. Many try to do it, and all ultimately fail, twisting God's Word to make it say something it just doesn't say. If you're going to say that homosexual activity is good before God, then you have to say that the Bible is either dangerous or deficient altogether. We talked about that last week.

### **No sex with animals, relatives, or children.**

Fifth, no sex with animals, relatives, or children. I hope all of these are obvious. I made brief mention of pedophilia last week as an illustration, to show the parallels between attempts to justify that sin and our attempts to justify all sorts of other sexual sin in our lives. I want to just come back to that very quickly to acknowledge I know that there are some, maybe many, of you in this room who have experienced sexual abuse like this when you were a child, and I can only imagine the wounds that some of this may bring up in your heart and your mind. This is not in your notes, but I want to send you to 1 Peter 5:7, where we are exhorted to "*cast our cares on Christ, because he cares deeply for us.*" I want to encourage you to go to Him for healing in your heart.

At the same time, I want you to know that if you don't have someone who can walk with you through that healing process, we, as elders and deacons and members in this faith family, would love to walk with you through that journey. You are not alone. Please feel free to let me know after the Worship Gathering, or someone over here in the Access Corner, and we would love to walk alongside you in your hurt.

### **No sexual lust...having wrong sexual desires for others.**

Next, the Bible clearly says no sexual lust, which is having wrong sexual desires for others. Jesus is clear in Matthew 5, "*Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" (Matthew 5:28) It is wrong for you to think about, entertain the thought of, or desire in any way sex with someone who's not your wife or your husband. That's lust.

### **No sexual immodesty...provoking wrong sexual desires in others.**

And then, no sexual immodesty, which is provoking wrong sexual desires in others. This is huge, women and men across this room. It is wrong for you to provoke sexual desires in someone else who is not your wife or your husband. Romans 14:21, "*Don't cause your brother to stumble.*" Specifically speaking to women, the Bible says, "*Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works* (1 Timothy 2:9-10). In other words, women, dress modestly—not in a way that draws attention to yourself sexually.

This is so big. In our culture, we are extremely loose when it comes to what women wear. Skin-tight clothes, low necklines, short dresses, short skirts, short shorts are the norm among us. This falls dreadfully short of the biblical ideal of modesty and self-control. This is in general, and then it's particularly applicable when it comes to the gathering of the church. The Bible says to many women in the church - with all due respect, even to sisters in this room right now, the way some of you are dressing around your brothers is at best a distraction from honoring God, and at worst it's an attempt (whether you realize it or not) to seduce men in the church to sin. The Bible says, "Don't do it." For the sake of your brothers and for the sake of your body, dress modestly!

Don't miss what 1 Timothy said there. It didn't say, "Don't adorn yourself with anything." It's not wrong to adorn yourself. You may wonder, "Well, then, what am I supposed to adorn myself with?" Not with physical immodesty that draws attention to you but with good works that draw attention to God. I urge you, church, no sexual immodesty, for your good, for others' good, and ultimately for the sake of God's glory to whom we want to point attention!

**No sexual allurement (including inappropriate emotional attachment) outside of marriage.**

Similarly, the Bible says: No sexual allurement (including inappropriate emotional attachment) outside of marriage. The Scriptures that I've listed here specifically pertain to a woman alluring a man, but this could obviously go either way and often involves both ways. Emotional attachment is often the gateway for many people (particularly women, but for men and women both) into a sexual affair.

You remember those feelings you had when you first were attracted to someone, and you thought about that person all the time, and you looked forward to every interaction with that person? Even if it was something small, you just wanted to be around them. You were emotionally attached to them. After time goes on, years of marriage sometimes even, and the shine of the romance begins to fade as you watch them brush their teeth on a daily basis. The reality is no man or woman can consistently measure up to that sweaty palm, butterfly feeling that you once got. Another woman or another man can come along, and she or he starts to make you feel like your wife or your husband did at one time. You begin to think about that other person, and you begin to look forward to your interactions with that other person. Slowly, you start to think about and turn to that other person in the way that you're supposed to turn to and think about your husband or your wife. You rationalize it, thinking this isn't emotional attachment; it's just enjoying time with somebody else. Maybe it's the kind of time your soul feels starved for, and so you think, "It's not physical, so it's not harmful." When the reality is, the more attached you become in your thoughts and emotions, the more you will find yourself wanting to attach to that person physically.

You read both Proverbs 5 and Proverbs 7, and you see an emotional attachment that eventually leads to a physical relationship. Listen to how the author describes it, in this case a woman alluring a man emotionally.

*With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.*

*And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths, for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death. (Proverbs 7:21-27)*

This can go both ways. No sexual allurement, and don't allow yourself to be allured. This is happening - I know this is happening in people's hearts and minds across this room today. You know it's happening. Don't do it. You're like an ox going to a slaughter!



### **No sexual looking or touching outside of marriage.**

Keep going here. No sexual looking or touching outside of marriage. Job 31:1, "*I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look on another woman.*" What a great verse/picture. Don't look at someone sexually who is not your husband or wife, and this is not just about lusting. This can involve taking advantage of another person when you are able to see something private that you shouldn't see. That's exactly what happened with Ham and Noah in Genesis 9.

It also pertains to what you touch. The Bible prohibits touching in any way that you would not normally touch your friend or a family member, in any way that is sexual in nature. In Deuteronomy 25, the law punishes a woman who grabs a guy in the crotch to help her husband in a fight. Not permissible! Mark it down. The crotch is off limits outside of marriage, no matter what is at stake!

### **No entertaining ourselves with or joking around about sex outside of marriage.**

No sexual looking or touching, and finally no entertaining ourselves with or joking around about sex outside of marriage. This is huge. Ephesians 5:3, listen to this passage:

*Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God...It is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. (Ephesians 5:3-5, 12)*

The reason this is so huge is because, in our culture and as Christians, even for those who say, "Okay, I'm not going to indulge myself sexually in these ways," so many of us are entertaining ourselves with those who do indulge themselves sexually in these ways. You say, "What do you mean?" Think about the books we read, the movies we pay to watch, the TV shows we watch, how many of them make light of or even exalt sexual immorality? Movie after movie, book after book, bestsellers like the *Fifty Shades of Grey* series and countless other subtle versions of the same thing are filling leisure reading among Christians. We read these things, we watch these things, and it's as if we've said to the world, "We're not going to do the things you do, but we will gladly pay money to watch and read about you doing them in front of us."

"*It must not be named among you,*" Ephesians 5:3 says. "*It's shameful even to speak of the things they do in secret.*" (Ephesians 5:12) Don't miss this. God's standard doesn't just stop with us avoiding these sins, but with us not entertaining ourselves with others' sins. I'm not presuming that to even talk about sexual immorality is sin. That would make this whole sermon a sin today. The key is, we're not talking about sexual immorality in a way that views it as good or even as the norm, but as what we're to avoid. So much of what we are exposing our eyes and our minds to—and so much of what we're exposing our kids' eyes and minds to—is dulling our senses to the point where we see sexual immorality as not so bad. In the end, it's actually kind of entertaining to us when it shouldn't be! We should grieve over it and run from it.

If you were in a room where a couple was making out on a couch, would you sit down in the seat next to them and just watch? You say, "Of course not, that's weird." Then why is it acceptable for you to do the exact same thing as long as that couple is on a TV or a movie

screen the size of a three-story building in front of you? This should not be. God's Word prohibits entertaining ourselves with or joking around about sex outside of marriage.

I want to be careful in all of this, in all these prohibitions—don't do this, don't do that—not to communicate that the Bible gives an entirely negative picture of sex. On the contrary, it doesn't. The Bible celebrates sex as good, as something designed by God for our good. Just think about it. God made man and woman in the way He did in the first place for a reason. God made the body for sexual pleasure.

One preacher said,

It wasn't like God made the man, made the woman, went and got a ham sandwich, came back, and was like, "What [in the world] is going on down there! Oh, my goodness, I can't believe it, look at that craziness! I never knew they'd do that! Oh, [wow...] how did they come up with that?" You look at the parts and it seems to be what the plan was. God created the body for pleasure, for sex, to be enjoyed in marriage. Sex is good, the body is good, and nudity is good, providing it's all in the context of marriage.

That's the key. You look back at all of these prohibitions, and the Bible prohibits sexual activity outside of marriage because God designed sexual activity for marriage. Don't get the wrong idea here. Sex isn't bad. Sex is good—great—within the boundaries that God has designed it for.

## **Common Practical Questions...**

### **How far is too far between a single man and a single woman?**

It's at this point that people start identifying grey areas. "Well, what about this? Or what about that?" There's a ton we could dive into, but I've listed three common practical questions here that I want to serve you with in the Word as we talk about sexual immorality.

Questions like, "How far is too far between a single man and a single woman?" It's questions like these where we start looking for specific Bible verses, and when we don't find one, we conclude, "Well, I guess I just have to figure this one out on my own." That's exactly what we've done with this question in the church in a way that, I'm convinced, has been disastrous for teenagers and single men and women all across the church.

I would even go so far as to say that the lack of an objective biblical answer to this question was disastrous in my life. I want to be completely honest with you this morning about this question in my life. Before I got married, particularly in high school and college, I had who knows how many conversations with friends and church leaders about this question, and I can't ever remember hearing a well-reasoned, objective, biblical answer to this question.

Instead, what I heard over and over and over again went something like this: "The Bible prohibits sex outside of marriage. But after that, the Bible doesn't give specifics. So you need to pray and set your own boundaries, basically build your own list of sexual standards that you are going to live by." So I and my Christian friends would talk about what those standards should be, but we all came up with different answers. Some guys said kissing was

okay and other guys said as long as clothes stayed on, it was okay. In reality, the guy who had the lowest standards would usually win out in the discussion.

This is an area where, quite honestly, I struggled. I struggled to set boundaries, I struggled to keep boundaries, and I found myself in this dangerous grey area that led to all sorts of confusion and guilt and failure. By God's grace, both Heather and I had never had sex with each other (or anybody else) before we were married, but that did not mean we had glorified God with our bodies.

I share all that to say that I remember well what this struggle was like, and I want to say today what I wish someone had said to me - maybe somebody did try to say this to me, and I didn't listen, but I want to urge you to listen this morning. I want to show you what I believe is a biblical, objective answer to this question, and I'll go ahead and warn you that, to many of you, it's going to sound extreme, restrictive even. You will likely be tempted to think, "Well, that's easy for you to say since you're married now," but I'm saying this out of a heart of hurt from past sin, out of a desire for your good, and ultimately out of the overflow of what Scripture seems to teach.

Follow this with me. I'm indebted here to a good book on this issue and others like it called *Sex, Dating, and Relationships* by pastors Gerald Hiestand and Jay Thomas. They observed:

Forty-two percent of (single) evangelicals between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine are currently in a sexual relationship, twenty-two percent have had sex in the past year, and an additional ten percent have had sex at least once. Assuming the accuracy of [that] data, this means only twenty-percent of young evangelicals have remained abstinent.

They continue on, saying:

The pastoral community must shoulder much of the blame here. Simply put, we pastors are not quite certain how to counsel singles and teens regarding appropriate sexual boundaries. We either offer subjective-biblical standards ("The Bible says be pure"), which can be massaged around like a wax nose, or objective-personal opinions ("Keep it above the neck"), which lack any real authority. Singles need an objective-biblical standard of premarital sexual ethics, and we pastors are the ones responsible for providing it.

I want to provide it, so here goes. The Bible gives us three God-ordained categories for relationships between men and women. When you look at relationships in the Bible, there are three categories, and all three categories have God-given standards for sexual activity in them.

First, you have the neighbor relationship. This is your relationship with your neighbor, where sexual activity is prohibited. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor, the people around us, which could be literal neighbors or friends or coworkers, whatever. We are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. In that relationship, we see all over Scripture that sexual activity is prohibited. The Bible never celebrates, in any way, sexual activity between neighbors, i.e., between a man and a woman (or two men or two women, for that matter) who are not married.

The reason I put 1 Corinthians 7 in parentheses here is because that's where the Bible says (and we'll look at this starting next week), "If you have a strong sexual desire, then get

married." He doesn't say, "Experiment with your neighbor, and then decide whether or not you want to get married." He says, "If you have a sexual desire that needs to be fulfilled, get married." In 1 Corinthians 7:1, the Bible is clear, "*It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.*" In other words, "It is good for a man not to have sexual activity with a woman" in this neighbor relationship. So that's the neighbor relationship, and sexual activity is prohibited there.

Then, second, there's the family relationship, which would include brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, children, etc., and again here sexual activity is prohibited. We've talked about this. The Bible forbids sexual activity with members of your family, apart from your husband or your wife.

Which then leads to the third God-ordained category of relationship: The marriage relationship between a man and a woman, and there sexual activity is commanded. In the first few verses of the next chapter in 1 Corinthians, the Bible commands a husband and a wife to engage in sexual activity together because that sexual union is a sign of the covenant relationship that exists in marriage before God. It's commanded there.

When you put all this together, you realize that God in His Word has no category for two people who aren't married but kind of, in some ways, act like they are, particularly sexually. That is not a God-ordained category of relationship, and there's not one place in all of God's Word where we are ever encouraged to engage in sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship.

Remember the definition of "*porneia*"? Sexual immorality is sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. We talked about how it's the kind of thing that you would be outraged to find your spouse doing with someone else. I'd be furious if another guy hugged my wife sexually, kissed my wife sexually, or touched my wife sexually in any way, yet many single Christian guys have no problem doing any (or all) of these things with a woman who's not their wife.

Which leads me to ask the question, "Would it be acceptable for me, as a married man, to kiss a woman who's not my wife?" You say, "Of course not." Guys, the reality is that any single woman that you are talking with, statistically, is likely going to be someone's wife, so why should you be kissing someone else's wife? You say, "Well, she might be my wife." And the Bible says, "Well, then make her your wife, and then kiss her all you want. But apart from that, 1 Corinthians 7, '*It is not good for a man to have sexual activity with a woman.*'" (1 Corinthians 7:1) She's your neighbor, and sexual activity is prohibited with your neighbor.

Then take this a step further because Scripture takes it a step further. You look at 1 Timothy 5:1-2, and Paul says to Timothy, "*Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, in all purity.*" (1 Timothy 5:1-2) The Bible here ties pure treatment of the opposite sex with the picture of the family relationship. So single men and women, what does purity look like with your sister? Would you make out with your sister? Would you passionately kiss your sister? You say, "Absolutely not! No way!" Why not? "Because she's my sister!" Precisely. There you have it: A standard for purity in your relationship with a single woman in Christ. Absolutely nothing sexual. No way. Why not? Because she's your sister.

Single men and single women, based on the three God-ordained categories of relationship in the Bible, I want to encourage you not to do anything sexually with another person who

is not your husband or your wife. You're looking for a general guideline? Here it is: Don't do anything that you wouldn't do with your brother or sister because any and all sexual activity is for marriage.

These three God-ordained categories of relationship lead to one God-glorifying conclusion: Regardless of whether you are single or married, flee any and all sexual activity outside of marriage. I am convinced that this is exactly how people in the first century would have heard these commands in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Thessalonians 4, and this is why the biblical authors never felt a need to spell out how far is too far. They'd already spelled it out: "Flee *porneia*. Flee any and all sexual activity outside of marriage."

I want to pause here and commend couples I know in this faith family who have had the courage to do this. Some couples who are moving toward marriage right now and other couples who are now married, and throughout their time of dating or courtship and then engagement, treated one another as brothers and sisters, and they didn't engage in any sexual activity that they wouldn't do with their brother or sister before they were married. It can be done, and it will glorify God according to His good design when it is done. Mark it down. I've never talked with a Christian couple that regretted all they didn't do before they were married, but I have talked to many who have regretted all they did do before they were married.

Please hear this. I challenge you, single men of God and single women of God, by the grace of God in Christ, honor your single brothers and sisters in Christ in a way that is totally other-worldly, completely courageous, and Christ-honoring, which really is the point, right? Our goal in the first place isn't to ask the question, "How close can I get to sinning without sinning?" Our goal is to ask the question, "How can I glorify God most with my body?" I don't see biblically how we would come to any other conclusion than this.

### **What about masturbation?**

Some might think, "Well, what I am to do with these sexual desires, these sexual urges?" All of this is complicated by the fact that people are waiting longer and longer to get married. At the time when God has designed our sexual desires to take effect, we're prolonging the avenue that He's designed for them to take effect in. So some people think, "What do I do with these urges?" Which leads to the question, "What about masturbation?"

The ironic thing is, it's single men who will often say, "I have a need to do this because I'm not married," but the reality is research shows that 70% of married men continue to masturbate. This is by no means exclusively a single issue, and it's not exclusively a male issue, either. Increasing numbers of women engaging in masturbation. Now again, many Christians think, "Well, the Bible doesn't speak directly against it anywhere, so maybe it's okay or even good." Just because the Bible doesn't address something specifically, doesn't mean it doesn't say anything at all. I'm convinced Scripture clearly speaks to this. Is masturbation glorifying to God? Think about God's good design for sex, all that we've seen in God's Word, and you realize that masturbation goes completely against that design. Think about it.

God designed sex to be relational, but masturbation is lustful. Sex is designed to be experienced in a relationship with a husband or wife, not with you sitting alone thinking about someone who isn't your husband or your wife. This is huge. Masturbation, by its very nature, necessitates sexual desire. If you are not desiring your husband or your wife, then your desires are wrong. If you are desiring your husband or wife, then go to your husband

or wife to fulfill that desire (1 Corinthians 7). God designed sex to be relational, and masturbation is not.

Similarly, God designed sex to be covenantal, but masturbation is non-committal. Sex is meant to bind a man to his wife in a committed, covenant relationship. It's the sign of a covenant. But masturbation completely perverts this covenant-making, covenant-celebrating, covenant-renewing design because it involves no commitment to anyone else.

God designed sex to be intimate; masturbation is superficial. It is shallow at best, not at all reflecting the intimate union that God has designed. God designed sex to be fruitful; masturbation is fruitless. It doesn't lead to child-rearing, it doesn't lead to faith-building, and it doesn't lead to relationship-growing. It's fruitless.

God designed sex to be selfless; masturbation is self-centered. It is designed to satisfy yourself, not another, which goes completely against God's design for sex. Which is why marriage doesn't solve the problem of masturbation. Because masturbation, for many people, is easier than sex with your spouse, because it's not really about sex at all. It's about a man's (or a woman's) desire to satisfy themselves, rather than give themselves to and for their spouse. Masturbation is completely self-centered.

God designed sex as a complex union; masturbation involves personal isolation. Masturbation is the complete opposite of what happens when two bodies, minds, and souls come together in sex. Individual isolation instead of complex union. Masturbation teaches people mentally, physically, and emotionally to satisfy themselves in a way that goes against God's design.

Finally, God designed sex as a complementary heterosexual act, but masturbation is a personal homosexual act. A male is aroused by a male, or a female is aroused by a female—same-sex arousal, same-sex fulfillment. You say, "No, it's not." Absolutely it is. Just because you imagine a heterosexual relationship (which, as we've already seen, is wrong) doesn't make this a heterosexual reality. It's personal homosexuality. We would be wise to heed the words of Romans 13:14: "*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*"

### **How do I fight pornography?**

The final question that I want us to dive into is how do I fight pornography? I have struggled with how to best address this. We know that pornography is wrong, yet statistics continue to show that approximately half of the men in the church (and increasing numbers of women) are at some level addicted to pornography. It is damaging souls, ruining marriages, destroying relationships, and crippling the church.

I've talked before about the number of young women who are going to the mission field that far outweighs the number of young men, and I believe one of the main reasons why so many men aren't taking hard assignments for Christ around the world is because pornography has a grip on their minds and their souls. I can't prove this, and I'm not saying that it's the only reason. They are weak, and I want to pastor a church of strong men and women. Strong men and women who are not engrossed fighting battles with pornography and consequently are ready to fight battles for the souls of people in Birmingham and Muslims and Hindus and Buddhists all around the world.

## THE GOSPEL AND PORNOGRAPHY

So how is this going to happen? I don't think my words this morning are sufficient to make anybody stop going to pornography, but I believe God's Word and the gospel are more than sufficient. You have an insert in your Worship Guide that I wanted you to have as a resource that simply spells out ten gospel exhortations.

What I've done here is taken the five threads of the gospel and applied these truths to the fight with pornography in two ways each. Under each one I've listed a particular passage from God's Word (in addition to other passages in parentheses). I'm not going to do a lot of explanation here. I really just want the gospel and God's Word to be clear, I pray, in a way that speaks to the hearts of men and women all across this room right now who are fighting battles with pornography. I use that word intentionally; this is a fight.

I put at the top of that page 1 Peter 2:11: "*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul*" (1 Peter 2:11). And then 2 Corinthians 10, "*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...*" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5)

This is a battle, a fight, and it is a hidden sin in so many lives and in so many pastors' lives. Over half of pastors say they've visited pornographic sites on the Internet sometime in the last year, and almost one in three have done so in the last month. I share those statistics with you with trembling. By God's grace, and only by God's grace, I do not have anything to do with pornography in my life—Internet sites or anything else—but those statistics just scream out, "Take heed, lest you fall!"

### **The Character of God**

I exhort us, first, based upon the character of God: Number one, brothers and sisters, cultivate unshakeable zeal for the glory of God's name. "*Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'*" (Matthew 6:9-10).

Do you want the glory of God's name? Do you long for the glory of God's name more than anything? More than images? Pray, "My Father in heaven, cause your name to be hallowed in my life. Cause your name to be hallowed with my eyes. Cause your name to be hallowed in my desires." Cultivate this, pray like this every morning, all day long, every night. Cultivate unending, unshakeable zeal for the glory of God's name.

Second, acknowledge your sexual drive as a good gift from a gracious God. It is good to have desires. We've seen this (Genesis 2). God has made you that way. "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed*" (Genesis 2:24-25). You were made in a way that fits together in one-flesh union with someone of the opposite sex.

Now God doesn't call everyone to marry. He gives grace for many to control this area in a life of God-glorifying singleness, but the reality is we're all hard-wired this way—with sexual

desire. That is a good gift from a gracious God. So sex isn't bad. It's good according to God's design.

### **The Sinfulness of Man**

The problem is we're not all only sexual beings, we're also sinful beings, which leads to the second set of exhortations based upon the sinfulness of man. Exhortation number three: Run, run, run, run from every temptation, knowing that one sin—one sin!—is enough to warrant infinite damnation.

*Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 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, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).*

Don't buy the idea, "This is no big deal. I'll just do it once." This is a huge deal. Remember that it was one sin in Genesis 3 that brought condemnation to all men (Romans 5). One sin brought about all the sin and all the suffering in all the world. Hate one sin, and run from every temptation, knowing that one sin is enough to warrant infinite damnation. And guard yourself with godly friendships and gospel accountability. We are sinful, and we need each other. *"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin"* (Hebrews 3:12-13).

The power of sin is found in its secrecy. As long as you can hide it, you'll continue to indulge in it. So be in relationship with other brothers or other sisters of the same sex. I meet every week with a couple of pastors, and we walk through specific questions in each other's lives. If you're not involved in a small group where you have this kind of relationship, I plead with you, get involved in a small group for your good, where you can say to a brother or sister, "I need help with this." You are not intended to fight this battle alone. Surround yourself with brothers and sisters who will spur you on toward Christ and by the grace of God, with the Word of God, help guard you from yourself. You and I need to be guarded from ourselves!

### **The Sufficiency of Christ**

We need to be pushed toward Christ, which leads to the next two exhortations based upon the sufficiency of Christ. Number five: Contemplate the price Christ paid for your purity. See Him writhing on a cross in agony. Fight tempting images with that image. See Him, not them! This is the point of 1 Corinthians 6:15-17. See the crucified Christ with you in front of that computer screen. Realize the crucified Christ is united with you as you look at that. *"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!"* (1 Corinthians 6:15) So see Him, see Christ with you, united to you, and as you do, contemplate the price He paid to save you from this. See Him, not them. Fight those images with His image.

Consider the compassion Christ has for the souls of men and women. Love and pray for them; don't exploit and abuse them. Women (and men) in pictures are people. They're someone's daughters or sons. There are parents who are weeping over you watching their children like this. These are not objects; they are souls. Love and pray for them; don't exploit and abuse them. *"When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"* (Matthew 9:36).



These women or men in these images need you to point them to Christ, not to fuel their exploitation. Their eternity is at stake. Consider the price Christ paid for your purity, and consider the compassion Christ has for their souls.

### **The Necessity of Faith**

Fourth component of the gospel, the necessity of faith, which leads to the seventh exhortation: Believe that God is for you and knows what is best for you. In calling you away from pornography, God is calling you away for your good. He knows what is best for you. Believe this! *"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing"* (Psalm 34:8-10). God has promised to give us everything we need, everything our souls truly desire! Believe this, believe this, believe this! God is for you, and He knows what is best for you.

How do you grow in your trust of Him? Memorize and meditate on Scripture. Fight the fight of faith with the weapon of the Word. *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you"* (Psalm 119:9-11). Memorize these Scriptures and others like them. Hide, lodge the Word deep within your heart. Take up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit to fight the flaming arrows of the evil one.

### **The Urgency of Eternity**

Don't give up, persevere, press on in light of the urgency of eternity. The stakes in this battle are high, brothers and sisters. They're eternally high. Ponder the eternal danger and destruction associated with sexual sin. Hear the words of Jesus:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell"* (Matthew 5:27-30).

That's Jesus in the first book of the New Testament, and then at the end of the New Testament, the Word says: *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the...sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."* (Revelation 22:14-15) Don't be counted among them, men! Women, don't be counted among them. This is not a game. Ponder the eternal danger and destruction associated with sexual sin. It damns! It damns.

The last exhortation—the best exhortation—in light of the urgency of eternity: Ponder the eternal delight and joy associated with future salvation. You have been saved to delight in God, and one day that delight will be complete and full. Be patient for that day. Long for that day, and look forward to that day when *"a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, [will cry] out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her*

*to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure’—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (Revelation 19:6-8).*

I urge you. Be found in Christ on that day.

## **Final Gospel Exhortations...**

All of this leads us to three final gospel exhortations. Where does all of this leave us—all that we’ve talked about this week and last week? Here’s where it leads us—to these three exhortations.

### **Repent of (and run from) any and all sexual activity outside of marriage.**

One, I invite you, I urge you, I plead with you based on the love and mercy of Christ: Repent of (and run from) any and all sexual activity outside of marriage. In what ways are you indulging in sexual activity outside of marriage? Maybe it’s adultery. Repent. Repent today. Stop trying to hide. You can’t hide. Repent.

Maybe it’s allurements, flirting with this man or that woman. Maybe it’s immodesty, maybe it’s lust, maybe it’s the entertainment you’re exposing yourself to. Maybe it’s sexual activity of any sort with a single guy or a single girl. Maybe it’s homosexual activity. Regardless, men and women, brothers and sisters, what do you need to repent of? And run from? In just a moment, we’re going to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, and I want to invite you to repent during these moments of any and all sexual activity of any sort outside of marriage.

### **Rejoice in (and run to) sexual activity in marriage.**

At the same time, I want to urge you to rejoice in (and run to) sexual activity in marriage. First Corinthians 7, if you’re single, and you can’t exercise self-control, then get married. Run to marriage, to a covenantal commitment to leave your mother and father and hold fast to a wife. We’ll talk about that more in the coming weeks.

If you’re married, then run to sexual activity in marriage. First Corinthians 7 is clear. This is a command. Married men and women, your bodies don’t just belong to you. So husbands, have great sex with your wife. Wives, have great sex with your husbands. First Corinthians 7 is every married man’s dream verse. Guys, you’ve got a verse in the Bible that commands you to have sex. This is yet one more good reason to take the Bible literally! One preacher said, “This is where we put the fun back in fundamentalism.”

Wives and husbands, run to sexual activity with each other. The best defense is a good offense. Wives, you want to guard your husband’s thoughts? Give him something to think about! That’s what the Bible’s telling you to do. Husbands, you want to keep your wife’s affections? Cuddle up with your wife whenever she wants. That’s what the Bible is telling you to do.

I remember when I preached an overview of the Song of Solomon one Sunday, and after our first worship gathering, an older couple came to me, all smiles. They said, “Pastor, that was a great sermon. We’re not even staying for small group; we’re headed right home.” I’m poking my mind’s eye out! But that’s what I want to call you to do. Rejoice in (and run to) sexual activity in marriage.

**Receive today (and rest in) the forgiveness and freedom, hope and healing that are found in Christ alone.**

Finally, I know enough to realize that I am speaking to a whole host of people who have fallen short of God's standards for sexuality in your life. Many of us, in many ways - many of you are wondering if you'll ever really have victory in this area of your life. I know enough to realize that others in this room have been hurt deeply by sexual sin that someone has committed against you or in a way that has affected you very deeply, and you're wondering if you'll ever heal from that in your life. I want to say to every single one of us, regardless of your past or present sin, struggles, pain, and hurt, I invite you to receive today (and rest in) the forgiveness and freedom, hope and healing that are found in Christ alone.

Christianity is a religion for those who have blown it. The truth is we've all sinned. We've all fallen short of God's glory; we've all blown it. For many of us, we've blown it sexually. But Jesus Christ lived a sinless life as our example, Jesus died for our sin on a cross as our substitute, and Jesus rose to forgive me of my sin. Then, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to me to enable me to live by a power not my own, to say "no" to sin and "yes" to God as a new man. I invite you to repent and receive His grace today. Let Him change you, and know that He will change you in a way that is gracious and good for you like none other.

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