

Sexual Sin and the Gospel

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[0:00] 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. In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Well, you can probably tell from the portion of our gospel text that I zeroed in on this morning, that you're about to be subjected to one of those uncomfortable sermons about sexual sin. I suppose I would give the disclaimer that this is going to be a little bit rated PG, but the only small child here is my own, so I'm not too worried about that. So, we're coming up on Valentine's Day, right? A time of the year when our culture celebrates the beauty of romantic love by selling us things. It's, of course, that time we receive Valentine's.

Now, has anyone seen the Puritan Valentine memes that have made their rounds on social media this time of year? They seem to be aimed at mocking the Puritans for having been kind of prudish. I'll give you a couple of examples. One of the Valentines reads, You almost make my heart dance, and dancing is forbidden. Another reads, quite bluntly, Being with you fills me with impure thoughts, and I am ashamed.

[2:14] Now, the Puritans, whether it was deserved or not, gathered for themselves a reputation for having been prudes. Now, whether that was deserved or not deserved is something of another matter, but I think in our cultural mockery of the Puritans, there's something else going on underneath the surface. Because I think that what our Christian faith teaches about God's will, for human sexuality and God's commandments on that front, is going to seem a little prudish to a culture that thinks that it's all fair game, where sex is concerned.

Thing is, it's not all fair game. God has spoken. God has revealed His will, and we are called to proclaim and to obey what God has revealed. What God has revealed to us, what God commands, is something that we need to be absolutely clear about. Look at what's at stake and what Jesus has to tell us this morning. Lust, the expression of lust, are dangerous and deadly, and we ignore what God has said about them at our own peril. We can't avoid it. We can't ignore it if we are going to be faithful to our Lord. But there is the temptation to compromise with the world around us on these issues, isn't there?

One doesn't have to look very far, for example, to find churches, to find professing Christians who have rejected what the Bible says about sex and are working in absolute opposition to what God has commanded. Christians are faced with a temptation not only to deny in word what God has commanded, but even to adopt lifestyles which deny what God has commanded.

Brothers and sisters, we are called to seek and proclaim righteousness. We cannot be silent, and we, as those who know the light of Christ, cannot live in darkness.

There's too much at stake. And then, of course, there is the temptation to be silent about what the Bible says on these matters because of legitimate prudishness. It's embarrassing or something that we don't talk about in polite company. Well, here's a newsflash for us. God talks about it.

[4:45] Why wouldn't we? The world talks about it. In fact, the culture is obsessed. Remember, as a youth group leader talking to a group of young men on this topic, one of them said something along the lines of this, why doesn't the church talk about this stuff? You know what I told him? I said, well, we should. We had better because the culture talks about it, and the culture is telling lies that are destroying bodies and souls and ruining lives. We better talk about it. Don't we need the counsel of God regarding sexual sin and what God has intended for sexuality? We need to speak up and speak the truth in love.

We need to be bold, but we also need to be compassionate. We must be clear, but we must not be self-righteous. But let me ask you this. If the church is silent on these matters, who is going to bear witness to God's truth? And if God's people aren't seeking to set an example for the world around us, who is going to set that example? Now, one thing we need to be clear about, sex is something that God created and said was good between a husband and a wife. The Bible tells us that the marriage bed is undefiled, if we look at the marriage liturgy in our own book of common prayer, we see the purposes for which God instituted marriage. The prayer book tells us that marriage signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his church. It also tells us that the union of husband and wife and heart, body, and mind, is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity, and when it is God's will for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

The historic prayer book, the 1662, adds another reason for marriage that the 1979 conveniently leaves out, and that's this. Marriage was ordained for a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication. Now, one has to wonder if they left it out in the 79 prayer book because they didn't think that fornication is a very big deal or something worth talking about. But in the right context, we see this reflected in what we believe about marriage.

Marriage between a man and a woman. Sex is something that is blessed by God. Now, in our gospel reading, Jesus speaks clearly about lust and about sexual sin. He starts with adultery, which, of course, is starting with something that's familiar. He starts with breaking the covenant of marriage with being unfaithful to one's spouse. Now, in a sense, Jesus is kind of starting with the obvious. Most people, I think, would agree that adultery is not that good of a thing.

[7:56] It's not commendable. It's probably not good for society or good for families. And one doesn't have to be a Christian even to think that adultery isn't good. But then Jesus pretty quickly ups the ante, doesn't he? 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.

Jesus condemns both adultery and lustful intent. So he really kind of condemns the whole spectrum there, doesn't he? It's all deadly. It's all in violation of God's law and God's commandments.

Now, Jesus unmistakably calls out the whole range of sexual immorality. Now, in 1 Corinthians, we see similarly strong words from St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 6.

Paul condemns adultery, of course, as Jesus did.

Paul also calls out sexual immorality, or as it's sometimes translated fornication in general. Now, what does that mean?

[9:36] Fornication, I think, is kind of an umbrella term as it's used in Scripture for sexual immorality. But as it's used, it especially means sex outside of marriage. Now, people being people, Christians are not exempt from the temptation to fornication.

The temptation to have sex outside of marriage. Especially in a culture that treats sex outside of marriage as normal. In fact, we live in a culture that treats chastity and purity as abnormal.

But let's be clear about something. God gave us his commandments for a reason.

He did not forbid fornication just because he's a cosmic killjoy who doesn't want anyone to have fun. He intended physical intimacy to be enjoyed within the lifetime commitment between a husband and a wife.

It is part of the self-giving that is marriage that God intended to last for life. Now, on a related note, I saw a study this week that suggested that children have the most stability and flourish the most when they're in families with a mom and a dad who are married to each other.

[10:56] Is that a surprise to anyone? Well, so let's think of it this way. Sex has a way of leading to children. And children do best when their moms and dads are married to each other in a loving, stable family.

God designed it that way. God is not a killjoy. He wants husbands and wives to have exclusive, intimate marriages with each other. And designed things so that each child would have the stability of a mom and a dad who are married to each other.

Now, Paul, here in 1 Corinthians, also talks about homosexual activity. In our culture, that is a polarizing topic, to say the least.

Now, Paul rightly identifies it as seriously sinful. That being said, there are a couple of approaches to the question of homosexual sin that we need to be careful to avoid.

First, we must be clear, the Bible does indeed identify homosexual activity as sinful and a violation of God's commandments. In our culture, we are tempted to go along, to get along, and depart from what the Bible says about that.

[12:14] Some churches have done just that. Some of you have encountered some of them, I'm sure. Now, on the other hand, we cannot treat the practice of homosexuality as an unpardonable sin.

As a sin that is somehow worse than all others. And some churches have done just that.

Homosexual sin is just one variety of sexual immorality.

It is not a category that is somehow worse than all others. Now, lest we think that it stops there, let's return to what Jesus says in Matthew.

Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Now, it's one thing to think that adultery is serious, maybe even to think that fornication is serious, but to have lustful intent and to enjoy lustful thoughts, is that really a big deal?

Jesus says that it is. Jesus identifies it with adultery. So, have you ever entertained or taken pleasure in lustful thoughts?

[13:26] Not looking for a show of hands here. But if so, you have essentially committed adultery, according to Jesus. Let that sink in for a second.

And while that sinks in, let me just say that in the West, in the 21st century, we are being bombarded with images that seek to make money out of preying on our lustful desires.

Advertisements, movies, TV shows, we get targeted so that people can try to make money off of us. And nowhere is that more true than in what the pornography industry is doing.

Now, disclaimer, I am about to raise something that is awkward to talk about in church, but it's something that we have to talk about, because it's real and it's a problem.

According to a recent study, 64% of American men view pornography at least monthly. Now, are you ready for that point to be driven home? The same study shows that men who identify as Christian view pornography at a similar rate to that of the general population.

[14:40] That's 64%. The study also shows that women who identify as Christian actually view pornography at a higher rate than non-Christian women. And studies show that, on average, children are exposed to pornography for the first time at age 11.

Although some recent studies suggest that the average has now moved closer to 8 years old.

Parents, we need to be on guard for our children, because they are likely to be exposed long before we're expecting it to happen.

It's serious. It's an epidemic. It can be an addiction. Men, women, children are being bombarded with this garbage, and lives are being ruined.

I tell you with all sincerity that I know people whose lives have been wrecked by going down the road that started with pornography. Ruined relationships, damaged marriages, even time spent in prison.

Ruined lives. Ruined lives. So, brothers and sisters, as we think about these examples, as we think about what God has commanded, we need to remember that lust and sexual sin are serious.

[16:06] So serious that Jesus says that it's better to pluck out an eye than to have our whole bodies cast into hell. Our culture would try to convince us that sexual immorality is freedom.

That classic term, free love, that turns out not to be so free, right? It leads to brokenness. It leads to slavery. It leads to misery. And it leads to death. True freedom is found in Christ.

And true liberation is found in Him. The whole spectrum. The whole spectrum. From adultery to fornication to taking pleasure in lustful thoughts and desires.

It's all deadly. And to be honest, I think it's fair to say that a good majority of people would stand condemned if that were the end of the story.

But, it is not unforgivable. Jesus knew that it wasn't unforgivable when He bled and died for those who have committed sexual sin.

[17:13] There is free and full forgiveness. There is peace with God in the cross of Jesus Christ. So where are you this morning?

Are you a believer who is still struggling with patterns of sexual sin? And if so, what are you going to do about it? Will you stop hiding it? Will you stop making excuses for it? Will you stop justifying it?

The Bible tells us what to do. 1 John 1.9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We confess in faith. Trusting that He will cleanse us. And sometimes, we need the help and the accountability of other believers.

If you are stuck in patterns of sinful behavior. Confide in a trustworthy Christian friend who can encourage you and keep you accountable.

[18:17] Or come see me for confession. I will confidentially hear your confession. Assure you of God's forgiveness to all who truly repent. And walk alongside you. So that you don't have to walk alone in the dark.

And hide in the dark corners. Sin drives us to the darkness. Out of shame. We try to hide from God. We run from God.

We do everything we can to keep our works from being exposed. That's how sin operates. That's how the devil works. But when we confess our sin, we bring it to the light.

When we run to God. Instead of away from God. We find that He is a loving Father who longs to embrace us. To cleanse us. And to give us new life.

So if you find yourself hiding. If you find yourself running. Please turn and run to God. And know the incredible unfathomable grace that is found in Jesus.

[19:23] Or maybe this morning. You're a believer who has been delivered from bondage to sexual sin. Or you're someone who has not been severely tempted in that way.

And if that's you. Look with compassion on those who are afflicted. There's no room for self-righteousness here. Seek to be a help to those who are struggling.

An encouragement to them. Don't add to the pile of shame that so often accompanies sin.

Especially sexual sin. Help those who are afflicted.

To bring it to the light of Christ. So that He can drive away the darkness. Now it is true, brothers and sisters. That everyone who even looks on another person with lustful intent.

Has committed adultery. In their heart. And stands condemned by God's law. But. It's also true.

That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

[20:30] To save those who were condemned. And the grace of God and Jesus Christ to all who believe. Is greater than the guilt and the power of sin.

In the name of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.