



The Ten Commandments

(39) The Seventh Commandment

(6) Flee Sexual Immorality

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

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This is sermon number 6 on the Seventh Commandment which is “You shall not commit adultery.” The Seventh Commandment is about all of life from the perspective of the fact that we are sexual beings and so under this heading we have explored a number of aspects of sex and sexuality – looking both at God’s purpose for sex and sexuality for married people and for single people and also a couple of the prominent issues of our time, namely pornography and homosexuality. This evening I want to bring this section of our series on the Ten Commandments to a close by considering the idea of fighting against sexual sin in all of its forms.

This is a subsection of the subject of fighting against sin in general. The gospel is about both forgiveness for our sins and being set free from the power of sin in our lives. One of the great points of the Bible is that sin is destructive and dehumanizing and obedience to God’s will, as expressed by his law, is the way of life and wellness and fulfillment. And so a huge part of the meaning of the gospel is that Jesus, by the application of his salvation to us, sets us free from the power of sin and gives us the desire and the power to turn from sin and live lives of obedience. It is vital to understand that this is a process that involves struggle on our part, and it is only perfected at death, but at the same time, by the transforming power of the gospel, change and progress is possible and inevitable for those who are united to Christ by faith.

It is important to keep both of these points in mind. One the one hand being saved does not mean that we are instantly delivered from sin in

our lives. There will always be a change, but it will never be a complete change as long as we are in this life. Paul's description of the Christian's struggle with sin in the last part of Romans 7 is crucial for our understanding of the normal Christian life. For instance in Romans 7:15 he writes, "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." And in verse 18 he says, "For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." Paul here is speaking about his struggle as a Christian. There is conflict in the Christian life between the God-given desires to do what is pleasing to God and the power of remaining sin which still pulls us in the direction of sin.

On the other hand, the transforming power of the gospel is a reality so that there is real change in the life of all believers in Jesus. In the very next chapter, Romans 8, Paul teaches that because of what Jesus has accomplished by his life, death and resurrection believers are able to "fulfill" "the righteous requirement of the law." We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and because of his power in our lives we are able to make progress in our life-long battle with sin. One of the ways of summing up this dynamic is that we are not yet what we will be, but we are no longer what we once were. There is a difference between the lives of believers and the lives of unbelievers. But at the same time believers continue to struggle with sin and they are not always successful in that struggle.

This perspective is vital for our understanding of the Christian life. And because our subject this evening is fighting against sexual sin, we will focus on the fight against sexual sin in the light of the reality of remaining sin and weakness and the reality of the transforming power of the gospel. Sexual temptation and sin is one of the areas in which we struggle. It is not the only area, nor is it more problematic than other areas of sin and temptation. But it is an important part of our spiritual struggle and so we will focus on that this evening.

The passage that we read and are going to look at this evening, is one of the key biblical passages that focuses specifically on sexual sin and its purpose is to instruct and encourage us in the fight against sexual sin. And what I think is particularly helpful about this passage is the fact that Paul is writing it with the expectation that what he writes will be of help

to people who are struggling with sexual sin. Underlying all that he says in this passage is the expectation that the truths that he expresses will actually help people to make progress in sexual purity.

That is very important because for some people fighting sexual sin is very hard and very discouraging. None of us are free from sexual sin, but it is also true that it is more of a problem for some people than for others. There is the reality of sexual addiction. There is the reality that, even if it is not a full blown addiction, there are many Christians who struggle with the temptation to satisfy sexual urges in ways that are outside of the will of God. And that is true for married people as well as unmarried people.

No doubt this has always been an issue – that is why it is dealt with in the Bible. But we are living in a time when sexual restraint is considered to be unhealthy and satisfying sexual urges is considered to be the right of all human beings and sexual temptation is everywhere. We have plenty of sexual temptation that comes from our own hearts, but we are living in a world that is obsessed with sex and that just adds to the difficulty as we as Christians seek sexual purity.

So let's work our way through this passage and consider the ideas that Paul sets before us as he seeks to help his readers in their pursuit of sexual purity.

First he makes the point that “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.” In the list of sins that follows he includes more than sexual sin. He includes a number of different sins and his point is that living in sin disqualifies one from the kingdom of God. There is a very significant difference between struggling with sin and living in sin and Paul here makes the point that if we are living in sin we will not inherit the kingdom of God. That is a fundamental part of the biblical message and part of the background to the gospel. Those who are saved by the gospel will not be free from sin, but their attitude towards sin and their relationship to sin is radically different from that of unbelievers.

And so applying this to sexual sin, we must say that one of the ways that God in his word helps us in the fight against sexual sin is by warning us that unrestrained sexual sin disqualifies us from the kingdom of God.

Warnings of the eternal consequences of living in sin is not the whole story, but it is certainly part of the biblical message. The Bible is very clear that you are not saved if you are just going with the flow in terms of satisfying your sexual urges. This is a matter of life and death – of heaven and hell. The “sexual immoral” shall “not inherit the kingdom of God.” This is an important way in which the Bible discourages sexual sin.

But thankfully it is not the only way. And so Paul goes on in verse 11 to say, “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.” Here is the encouragement of the gospel. There is salvation for all kinds of sinners including sexual sinners. Through Christ and through the Holy Spirit every kind of sinner can be washed, sanctified and justified. There is forgiveness for sexual sin. And there is deliverance from sexual sin. That is the good news and it is the key encouragement in the fight against all sin including sexual sin.

Hopelessness is deadly when it comes to fighting against sin. Hopelessness leads to giving up. Hopelessness makes it impossible to put in the effort required to make progress in the battle against sin in our lives. And it is huge factor in the whole matter of making progress in the whole matter of overcoming sexual sin in our lives. It is a hard struggle. There will be failures and setbacks. This is why the gospel is such an important factor in overcoming sin.

There is the objective power that we receive as believers through the action of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit does not work apart from our own efforts. The Holy Spirit does not drive us like a machine. There is a great mystery in the way that the Holy Spirit works in us, but one thing is clear is that his work in us motivates us and empowers us to be engaged in the fight. And so hope is a huge factor. And that is why Paul speaks of the gospel in this connection. “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.” This is a huge encouragement for us not to give up in the fight. If we are fighting we are forgiven, and if we are believing we are given the strength to make progress and eventually to overcome. Do not give up!

Now in the next paragraph Paul continues his exhortation and encouragement with a more direct focus on sexual sin. The first thing he deals with in this section is the idea that one of the blessings of the gospel is that we are not “dominated by anything.” It seems that some of the Corinthians were engaging in sexual sin using the excuse of Christian freedom. Christian freedom is an important part of biblical teaching about the gospel, but it is easily misused or misunderstood. So Paul writes in verse 12-13, “‘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.”

Some of what Paul writes in these verses are words that the Corinthians were using to excuse their sexual immorality – not what Paul is actually teaching here. His overall point in these verses is that our desires must be controlled. Sex is a good thing in its place. Food is a good thing when it is under control. But what is otherwise lawful become sin when it dominates us. And so the key point that Paul is making here is that we as Christians are not to be dominated by anything. We can be dominated by our sexual urges. We can be dominated by our desire for food. But one of the blessings of the gospel is that we are given the power not to be dominated by anything.

This is an important part of the gospel. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. One of the blessings of the gospel is that we are not slaves to our appetites and urges. In Romans 6:14 Paul writes “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” In Titus 2:12 Paul reminds us that the grace of God trains us “to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age....”

Again it is important to remember that self-control does not come easily. It is not that the gift of self-control makes it possible for us to exercise self-control with ease. It can be a long battle. For some people it is harder than others. People struggle for self-control in different areas. And yet here again, there is hope for progress because of the good news that Jesus died and rose again so that we might be enabled to live self-controlled lives.

One of the key lessons about self-control is that there is a relationship between self-control in little things and self-control in big things. There is lots of practice in everyday life for self-control – just learning to be disciplined about eating and resting and working and pleasures and so on. We must learn in every area of life not to be dominated by our desires and urges, but to control them so that our lives are orderly and disciplined. And all of this relates to learning to control our sexual desires as well. Again, self-control is a gift, but at the same time it is something that is learned through practice and persistence.

Now in the rest of this paragraph, Paul gives us a number of important insights about our bodies and the relationship between our bodies, our sexuality and the Lord. The points that Paul makes in this section are very important in the fight against sexual immorality.

First he says, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” This is hugely important. “Our body is ... for the Lord.” That is a statement of purpose. It answers the question – “What are our bodies for?” The answer is that our bodies are for the Lord. That means that our bodies are not for ourselves. The ultimate purpose for our bodies is not so that we can use them as we see fit. The ultimate purpose for our bodies is not so that we can use them for our own pleasure. “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord...” That is the opposite of our own inclinations and it is the opposite of the message of the world that tells us that we belong to ourselves and our highest goal in life is our own pleasure.

Our bodies are meant for the Lord. What a powerful and profound idea that this! It means that we are to use our bodies for the Lord. Everything that makes our bodies what they are is to be used for the Lord – and that includes our sexuality – our sexual desires. They come from God and they are to be used for God.

And then Paul goes on to say that “the Lord [is] for the body.” “The body is ... for the Lord, and the Lord [is] for the body.” This idea that the Lord is for the body is explained in the verses that follow. Paul goes on to speak of the intimate relationship between the Lord and our bodies by speaking of our union with Christ. As believers we are united to Christ. We are one with Christ. We are part of Christ’s body. It is

because of this close relationship between Christ and our bodies that there is a relationship between Christ's resurrection and our future resurrection. Do we live with the hope of the resurrection? Well we must remember that that hope is rooted in the fact that we are members of Christ's body.

So when Paul says that "the Lord [is] for the body" he is speaking about how the Lord is vitally interested in his body of which our bodies are a part. The Lord gave himself for his body. The Lord's life is the life of the body. The Lord is the head of the body. He is for the body in all kinds of ways because of all that he has done and continues to do for his body.

And to this profound idea Paul brings in the idea of sex. What Paul says here is absolutely staggering! Verses 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.'"

The act of sexual intercourse is a very profound thing as we have seen earlier in this series. It is a profoundly unifying act. It is much more than just a physical coupling for pleasure. It makes two people one in a very profound way. And when this happens outside of marriage, that is very problematic. Paul here is speaking about being joined to a prostitute. But Jesus says that to lust after a woman is to commit adultery and so we can include a much broader range of sexual immorality here.

The horrible thing that happens when a Christian is involved in sexual intercourse outside of marriage is that the body of Christ is sinfully joined to the other person. Paul is saying that sexual immorality involves the body of Christ in the immoral act. As Christians our bodies are members of the body of Christ and when we engage in sexual immorality we involve the body of Christ in that immoral act. Paul says that "the members of Christ" are joined to a prostitute.

The point is that our union with Christ is such an intimate thing that when Christians engage in sexual immorality, it is a member of Christ's body that is involved in that act. And the way Paul speaks of that here makes it clear that we should abhor the thought of a member of the

body of Christ being united to a prostitute and we might add, being involved in any act of sexual immorality. There is something that is so horrifying about that thought that Paul says “Never!” or “Let it not be” The Greek phrase translated as “never!” in the ESV is a very strong negative which is translated in other places as “certainly not” or “By no means.”

This is a powerful disincentive for sexual immorality. Paul emphasizes here that our bodies are members of Christ and the thought of using a body that is a member of Christ’s body for immorality is horrifying. It is tremendously disturbing. And obviously Paul is telling us this and expressing it as he does here to help us to see how serious sexual immorality is. What Paul says here is meant to be shocking and his purpose is that our whole being will recoil at the thought of involving the body of Christ in an intimate union with sexual sin.

And so Paul continues, “Flee from sexual immorality.” It is shockingly evil to involve a member of Christ’s body in sexual immorality and so it is something that we are to flee. Flee because it is so dishonoring to Christ. Flee because it is so dangerous. Flee because it is so harmful. The desires are powerful, but the pleasure is fleeting and the result is shockingly dishonoring to Christ and harmful to our relationship with God and to our relationship with our spouse – whether present or future. It is not how God intended for sex to be engaged in and so it is destructive.

Paul continues to pile up reasons to “flee sexual immorality.” Verse 18, “Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.” About this sentence, Leon Morris writes, “He does not say that it is the most serious of all sins, but that its relation to the body is unique.” It is not clear exactly what Paul means when he contrasts a sin committed outside the body with sexual immorality which is committed against our body, but the general idea is clear enough from the context. Paul has been talking about the significance of our bodies. He has said that our bodies are for the Lord. He has point out how awful it is when the body of a believer which is a member of Christ’s body is engaged in sexual sin. And he is going to say that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

The general thrust of this whole section is that we are to glorify God with our bodies and sexual immorality is a grossly immoral way of using our bodies. Sinning against our bodies is part of this whole discussion about using our bodies for the glory of God. Whatever it means precisely, the general idea is clear enough that it is a gross misuse of our bodies to use them for sexual immorality.

Then he mentions that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and that we are not our own. Verse 19-20 “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.”

Our bodies are sacred. Since the Holy Spirit dwells within us they are temples of the Holy Spirit. Again Paul is impressing upon us the intimate relationship between the believer and God. Our bodies are members of the body of Christ and we are temples of the Holy Spirit and further they do not belong to us. They were bought with a price, which is the blood of Christ. We are not our own.

Now all of this is a very powerful argument for sexual purity. The points that Paul makes in this passage are points that will resonate with believers because believers have been born again and given new hearts that love God and desire to please him. Our eyes have been opened to the reality of God and the goodness of the holiness of God and so these things that Paul mentions here are things that will connect powerfully with our hearts. Paul is expecting that we will feel something of the horror of idea of uniting the body of Christ to a prostitute and something of the sacredness of a body in which the Holy Spirit dwells. He is expecting that we will feel the weight of the fact that our bodies do not even belong to us, but that they belong to Jesus not only by virtue of creation, but also he bought them with his own blood.

And the point that I want to impress upon us all is that these are resources that God gives us in his word to help us in the fight against sexual immorality. It is sometimes felt that we are helpless against the powerful sexual passions within us. But if we are believing in Christ we are not because of the transforming power of the gospel. And the assumption behind this passage is that the different points that Paul

makes will help – will make a difference. They are part of the way that God in his word equips us and strengthens us in the fight against sexual sin.

And so what we need to do is ponder these things. Much of what Paul writes in these verses teach us who we are in Christ. The world defines us according to our sexual proclivities and insists that we be free to satisfy our sexual desires however we see fit. The Bible defines us as Christians in ways that powerfully help us to live in harmony with the truth as it is in Jesus and in the gospel. Our bodies are for the Lord. Our bodies are members of Christ. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are not our own, they are bought with a price.

We need to allow those truths to shape our self-identities. These concepts define us and define our bodies. The implications of these truths are glorious beyond words. And one of those glorious implications is that we have the most wonderful calling to use our bodies to the glory of God. That is our greatest obligation. But it is also our greatest blessing and honor. It is hard in that we have to fight against our sinful nature and crucify some of our desires. But it is infinitely worth it because there is no greater blessing for us than to glorify God. That is the most worthwhile thing we can ever do and therefore it is the way to the greatest joy and satisfaction.