

## Sermon: “Why Are Sexual Sins So Significant?”

NOTE: This sermon was first delivered at Christ Church of Oak Brook in Oak Brook, Illinois. Permission is granted to use it in any way that may be helpful to your church or in any other venue in which you are proclaiming God’s Word.

### *Why Are Sexual Sins So Significant?*

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Leviticus 18:1-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:16 “The two will become one flesh.”

### INTRODUCTION

- A. On our recent church history tour I was speaking with a European who was wondering why we in the United States make such big fuss over moral issues. He said almost word for word what you and I have heard many others say, “What’s the big deal about adultery?! It’s no bigger sin than gossip and all the others!”
1. If that’s so, why don’t the newspapers report on page 1 when a movie star or some other celebrity gossips, as they do when such a person “has an affair?”
  2. The answer media people give to that question is that we are much more interested in, and likely to purchase a paper about, such a person committing adultery or fornication than if he or she is gossiping.
  3. Clearly, there is something about sex that taps deeply into the core of our very being.
    - a. Furthermore, we ignore this reality at our peril, as we read in our text.
    - b. To hold to the fashion that sex sins are “no big deal” or even “not sins at all,” as many are wont to say, is
      - to listen more to the prince of this world
      - than to the Owner and Ruler of the universe
        - who made us as we are,
        - who knows us thoroughly,
        - whose image we bear,
        - and who has called us to be holy, as he is holy.
  4. It is, therefore, understandable how the world can be confused about this issue, indeed why some acts should even be called sins, but there should be no confusion in this regard in the church. “Do not be deceived,” Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:9.
- B. Why, then, are sex sins so different, treated by God in his Word with special attention?
1. To phrase the question in this way makes certain assumptions which need clarification to frame our reflections in the moments ahead.

- a. First, God has not told us all his reasons for the commandments he has given us.
    - 1) When he tells us not to do something, we simply trust he knows better and then obey him. (Trust and obey, as we just sang; there's no other way.)
    - 2) This is easily understood on the human plane: parents often establish rules the reasons for which children cannot always understand, but they trust the parent loves them and has their best interests in mind.
  - b. Second, in this short time we obviously cannot say all that could be said on this subject.
  - c. Third, while God wants all people to keep themselves from such behaviors, his commands are given to his people, to the church, for several reasons, one of which is to more effectively accomplish the calling, the mission, he has given us.
    - 1) Life would be much more enjoyable in our society if everyone obeyed God's commands. You have to look no farther than the person whose spouse has just left him or her for another to support that assumption; countless other examples could easily be given. This is why the Psalmist said that the commands of the Lord, far from being onerous, are "more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb...in keeping them there is great reward." (19:8-11) In Psalm 119 from the depths of his soul he cried out, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long...Your commands make me wiser than my enemies [and] I have more insight than all my teachers". (vss. 97-99)
    - 2) God has given this awareness to his people who he commands to live in these ways for a number of obvious reasons, one of which is to more effectively accomplish the calling, the mission he has given us.
2. Thus, the Holy Spirit has revealed to Moses and Paul, as well as to other writers of the Bible, vital aspects of this subject, and it is important, especially in this day in our culture, that we examine them closely—and act on them!
  3. Why, then, are sex sins so significant?
    - I. They defile the one who does them. (Leviticus 18, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)
      - A. All these commands are based on who God is, on what kind of God we have, the character of the God with whom we have to deal.
        1. The commands in our Old Testament text are framed within the statements, "I am the LORD your God."
        2. Further, at the end of the passage we read is another command: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."
        3. Friends, the holiness of God is an awesome matter.
          - a. At the heart of the word holy is the concept of separateness from that which is evil. God, who is holy, will not fellowship with sin. (1 Corinthians 6:13b-20 [cf. Isaiah 59:2; 1 Peter 3:7])



1. Now notice something very important: Paul next says, “And that is what some of you were.”
2. Three clear and unmistakable points leap out at us:
  - a. It is possible to change.
  - b. Reformed sinners will be saved.
  - c. These behaviors are not approved by God: they are sins to be avoided by people holy to him.
3. “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.”
  - a. “But” is a big word in the Bible, often as here showing the huge and eternally significant contrast to follow.
  - b. The words washed, sanctified, and justified can be seen as three different dimensions of the same spiritual experience. The outstanding Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, following the Reformation giant, John Calvin, writes, the “idea is that they had been converted, or completely changed. They had put off the old [nature] and put on the new [nature]. Their sins, considered as filth, had been washed away; considered as pollution, they had been purged or purified; considered as guilt, they had been covered with the righteousness of God.”
4. Further, that this occurred “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” means to be done in his authority and character, through his all-sufficient power and contrastingly different moral being.
5. Note also that this change has come “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”
  - a. Here we have another New Testament text where all three Persons of the Trinity are mentioned together and involved in our salvation.
  - b. Depending on the context the word God sometimes refers to the Father, as here, and sometimes to what is called the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - c. The new nature that produces behavior and work pleasing to God in contrast to the catalogue of sins Paul has just listed, comes from the operation of the Holy Spirit in the authority and character of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - d. You see, there is no excuse for continuing in these sins.
    - 1) In this age of biology people are looking for genetic causes for so much of human behavior, including these sins.
    - 2) Now that the human genome has been mapped, there is still no scientific evidence of any genetic cause to these or other sins. I don’t expect there ever will be any, but the question is a moot one anyway.
    - 3) The clear teaching of the Bible is that these sins are
      - a) against God’s will
      - b) defile those who do them,
      - c) and are able to be overcome in the power and character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- d) Yet, while the defilement of sin can be overcome in Christ, the consequences of sins usually remain.
  - 1- For example, though Samson was forgiven by God, the blindness that resulted from his disobedience remained for the rest of his life.
  - 2- Thus, sins, and sexual sins in particular,

## II. Sexual sins endanger the one who does them. (1 Corinthians 6:12, 13, 18)

- A. Human beings crave freedom, and Americans especially. One didn't have to listen long to convention reports this past week to observe how deeply people feel about freedom.
  1. The Corinthians were no different. The value system of the cosmopolitan metropolis of about 650,000 people was pagan to the core. Over a thousand cult prostitutes plied their trade with those who came to worship Artemis, the goddess of love.
    - a. When Paul was in Corinth he preached the Gospel of true freedom in Christ, that in contrast to all other religions they did not have to earn their salvation by doing certain things, to appease angry and capricious gods, especially not the immoral things that were part of their religion.
    - b. The Corinthians heard the first part (about freedom) but missed the last point (about immorality).
  2. Focusing on the freedom they were lax on certain matters which Paul is addressing in verses 12 following, quoting from them in his reply.
    - a. Misapplying the principle of Christian freedom, the Corinthians say "everything is permissible," but Paul gently leads them beyond, beginning with a point they can understand: expediency, e.g., not all things (speaking of matters that are not intrinsically wrong) not all of them are beneficial.
      - That is, there are some things that are not expressly forbidden for a believer, but because of their results it is unwise to do them. He thus easily establishes that freedom has its limits.
      - How much more, then, is it expedient to avoid practices that are intrinsically wrong and downright dangerous!
      - One does not have to look far for a contemporary example.
        - 1) Illustrations of sexual sins against the body abound with the many sexually transmitted diseases (over 35 at last count) which are epidemic in our country and elsewhere in the world today and some of which were in Paul's time.
          - a) Two of the most common and most dangerous STDs today are chlamydia and the human papillomavirus (HPV).
          - b) OBGYN specialist, Dr. Joe McIlheney has observed that the contagion is such that people who have "sex outside marriage with someone who has had sex before, will almost always get a sexually transmitted disease." Dr. McIlheney clarified his statement to mean that this is true unless the

person who has had sex before has received treatment for any STDs he or she has contracted.

- c) However, people usually do not know they have an STD. Furthermore, strong research evidence exists to show that males and females often lie about their past and ongoing sexual experiences.
  - d) The phenomenon of babies being born with syphilis has increased 20 times just since the 1970's. When untreated, syphilis appears to go away but reappears after age 50 resulting in dementia.
  - e) HPV causes cancer and many other serious effects. Until recently it caused more deaths than AIDS.
  - f) Since God loves the people he created, and since he knows and wants to spare them (us) the trauma resulting from certain behaviors, it is easy to see why he would provide laws, the following of which would prevent such anguish.
- 2) Many other examples could be given were time available. To cite just one example: significantly higher levels of depression.
  - 3) When such sins are discovered those who practice them experience an often excruciating distress.
    - In one office cameras were installed on top of each computer terminal to allow employees to send video e-mail messages. A woman, who was having an affair with a married co-worker, decided one day to send him a spicy message. So she turned on the camera and went into a striptease while vividly describing the night they would have during their illicit rendezvous at their favorite hotel.
    - A major problem developed, however, when she mistakenly clicked on the wrong distribution list as she went to send the message. Instead of transmitting it to her paramour, she sent it to 480 people throughout the company!
    - Freedom does have its limits; not everything is beneficial, Paul writes. Sin is destructive and God wants to spare his people from such torment.
- b. Next, the Apostle helps the Corinthians see that as a Christian he will not allow himself to be controlled by anything. One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is self-control.
  - c. Then he takes up an argument the Corinthians had advanced from analogy: in essence, fornication is as natural as eating.
    - 1) Paul points out the flaws in this logic with dispatch: there is no such connection between the body and unmarried sex as exists between the stomach and food.
    - 2) Both the stomach and food are temporary; the Lord will do away with both of them. (v. 13) To those who mock, advise them to keep the

eternal perspective: God will bring an end to the current age. Life is much more than “eat, drink, and be merry.”

- d. The misuse of freedom has caused human beings disaster ever since Adam and Eve, not only for individuals but corporately as well.

B. Sexual sins also endanger our whole society.

1. The national news media are beginning to report on the high cost to society of STD’s...and of divorce. How much divorce would there be if adultery were not practiced?!
2. The state of Illinois recognizes the threat in extramarital sex.
  - Adultery, fornication, incest, and many other deviant sex acts are listed in the Illinois Criminal Code as sex offenses. The code includes a statement about “the community’s interest in preserving the monogamous marriage and family institution which is the current basis of our social and moral structure.” (Division I, Title III, Part B, Article 11)
  - Monogamous heterosexual marriage is the norm for our state and is what the Illinois School Code requires our public school teachers to teach their students in sex education classes. (Cf. above 9.c.) In fact, “...common law marriages are not recognized in Illinois; cohabitation alone can never result in a valid marriage;” (750 ILCS 5/212 Prohibited Marriages)
3. We should support our teachers on this matter. Cohabitation is a disaster. I’ll not repeat here what I’ve written in a *Newsletter* article but just note that those who cohabit rather than marry typically experience significantly higher levels of
  - conflict,
  - violence,
  - insecurity, and
  - ill health, among many other sad outcomes. They also
  - break their relationships much more frequently
    - during cohabitation (when this happens trauma similar to divorce is felt),
    - and if they marry, they are much more likely to divorce.
    - According to a recent study by sociologists at the University of California, Irvine, reported in the July issue of *The Family in America: New Research*, cohabitators are also much more likely to be unfaithful to their partners, whether they marry or not.
4. In his book, *The Death of Outrage*, William Bennett wisely writes, “The act of sex has complicated and profound repercussions. To deny this, to consider it to be something less special and powerful than it is, is a dodge and a lie. Sexual indiscipline can be a threat to the stability of crucial human affairs. That is one reason why we seek to put it under ritual and marriage vow.”

- C. Paul explains in our text that “all other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.” (v. 18)
1. He or she thus endangers him or herself in the ways we’ve just been considering and in other ways we’ll examine in a moment.
  2. These other ways involve how God created our body. To use our body in ways contrary to God’s will is also to

III. Sexual sins hinder our relationship with the Lord. (Leviticus 18, 19:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:13b-20; cf. Isaiah 59:2; John 15:1 Peter 3:7)

- A. In verse 13 ff. Paul gives us information about the human body that is crucial to the issue before us and necessary to know for our own sexuality and in order to help others avoid peril.
1. He says, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”
    - a. The word he uses for body is *soma*, from which we obtain our word somatic.
    - b. This word for body refers to the whole personality in relationship with God. The Bible portrays a person as being a holistic entity so that his or her body and spirit are one. A person’s *soma* is not simply an external part of him or herself; he or she doesn’t just have a body but is a body that is animated with his or her spirit, the life principle which controls the body.
      - The words soul and spirit are used interchangeably in the Bible.
      - The holistic body is the essence of the human being’s personality, not just an accidental or inferior appendage to be mistreated.
    - c. The body has been designed to be related to Christ, including being the dwelling place of his Spirit, i.e., the Holy Spirit. This is **not** to say that Christ and the Spirit are the same, the whole being of God belongs to and is shared by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
    - d. But it is the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell with one who believes in Christ.
      - 1) This reality is what Paul is referring to when he says, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?” and “he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.”
      - 2) Further, Paul asks in verse 19, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God.” HERE NOTICE TWO VERY IMPORTANT REALITIES:
        - a) First, the word “body” is singular and refers to you personally, not plural meaning the whole church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, as in chapter 3:16 when he used a similar expression. That is, the Holy Spirit dwells with you in your soma, your body, your person as a whole.

- Thus, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. **Think of that for a moment! I'm going to stop to let that thought and its implications seep deeper into your mind and heart!**
    - **Think: as one who trusts and obeys Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within you.**
    - **What does that mean for**
      - **your purpose in life?**
      - **what you do and don't do and why?**
- b) Second, when Paul says your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, he uses the special Greek word, *naos*, which refers to the holiest part of the temple, the sanctuary where God dwelt. Paul did not use the word, *hieron*, which referred to the whole temple complex with its buildings and courts.
2. Now, this body of yours, Paul continues, is highly esteemed by the Lord, who took on a body for himself thus bringing great honor and dignity to the human body. You're known to an extent by whom you associate with, right?! This fact should be especially so for us who walk with the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Jesus' body was resurrected, as a first fruit of our own body's resurrection.
- Therefore, we ought not deprecate and mistreat our body; it should not be abused.
  - **Nor should it be united with evil!**
3. The Apostle quotes from the Old Testament, the creation account in Genesis 2, and explains that in the sexual union a man and a woman by God's design become one flesh.
- a. This unique bonding is a psychophysical and spiritual gluing of the two people together.
  - b. It has been described well by educator, theologian, and pastor Donald Joy in the quote on the front of our worship folder today.
    - "The mystery of human attachment is so profound that it can't be understood merely in psychological terms. It includes biological, psychological, spiritual, even ethical dimensions. By pair bonding, I refer to that exclusive, lifelong, mutually attaching relationship that a woman and a man form one new entity, while each retains individuality and integrity as a separate, distinct person. They together form a 'persona' both greater than, and different from, the sum of the two parts."
  - c. The shredding of this bond is the basis of the enormous pain in divorce as the two that have become one are torn and ripped apart.
  - d. But how beautiful this oneness is when done according to God's plan!

B. We are thus to honor God with our body (v. 20).

1. The actual word translated honor in the NIV is literally glorify.

2. One of the leading Bible scholars of our time and one I especially appreciate, Leon Morris, writes, “The prime motive in the service of the Christian must be not the accomplishing of purposes which seem to him to be desirable, but the glory of God...[and the tense of the Greek here clearly indicates that] Paul does not want the command to glorify God to be taken as something that does not matter. There is an urgency about it. Let there be no delay in obeying.” We glorify God when we obey his commands. In so doing we testify strongly to the world regarding the One to whom we belong.
  3. We honor God by teaching and modeling for our children that reserving sex for marriage, and in so doing obeying God’s will, witnesses to our creation as bearers of his image (demonstrating our significant difference from and superiority to animals with their sex drives, most of which do it with any female available.)
- C. Now contemplate in the light of what we’ve just been considering what happens when one engages in fornication, adultery, or prostitution.
1. If the person is a believer, he takes a temple in which the Holy, Holy, Holy, Holy Spirit resides and unites it with someone else in an unholy alliance that offends the very God of the universe!
  2. “Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute?” Paul immediately answers his rhetorical question with a thunderous response: *me genoito!* “Never!” in our NIV translation, but it is a powerful exclamation in the Greek which the English words, “may it not be,” only remotely convey.
  3. “Do you not know,” Paul continues, “that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh. But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit,” a reference to our mystical union with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the bodies of believers.
  4. We can now see what is especially significant about sexual sins.

IV. Sexual sins also hinder our calling. (1 Corinthians 6:20 b)

A. I am talking about an essential aspect of our very identity here.

1. Paul says, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price”, a very steep price: the suffering of the Son of God.
2. The Heidelberg Catechism, a product of the Reformation, puts it this way:
  - “What is your only comfort, in life and in death? That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so

well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.”

3. We have been saved for his service.
  - a. This is our calling, the Latin word for which is *vocare*, the basis of our word vocation.
  - b. In the Bible and in historic Christian theology our vocation is to be Christ’s witnesses, to live and speak of him and his plan of salvation, including what he has done for us, and to extend God’s kingdom.
    - Two courses being offered this fall will be especially helpful to you in this regard: one by Elder Bruce Buteyn and the other in Sherri Adam’s ministry. The insert in the September Newsletter and the education office will have further information.
4. If this is our message, our method must be congruent.
  - a. As Dr. Harley Swiggum, author of the *Bethel Series*, has said, “You can’t attract people to Christ if you’re living your life in the gutter.” It just doesn’t work. It’s a colossal disconnect and causes us to fail the Lord.
  - b. “Be without reproach,” Paul tells Timothy to admonish his people.
    - Not long ago a fellow came to my office and asked me to officiate at his wedding. In our discussion he revealed to me that he and his fiancée were living together to save money. He hastened to tell me that they were not engaging in sex. Now I’ve been around long enough to know that a very strong likelihood exists that that wasn’t true.
    - I said, there is another problem with what you are doing. Even if you aren’t having sex, the neighbors and your friends and relatives who know you are a Christian, and whom you have the greatest opportunity to reach for Christ, know what you are doing, and it looks to them like you are doing what men and women, who live together as you are, do in fact do. Is not what you are doing undermining your witness?
    - I shared with him Paul’s admonition to Timothy and what he wrote to the Ephesians in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter: “...among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality (*porneia*, the same word in our text), or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”
    - Do not compromise your calling.
    - To strengthen his witness for Christ this person told me he would leave and move in with a relative until the wedding.
  - c. How are you doing in withstanding the temptation to engage in sexual immorality?

- V. If your friend or loved one needs support, God provides all-sufficient help to overcome sexual sins and all others. (1 Corinthians 6:11-20; 10:13)

- A. If sexual sins are not a temptation for you,
1. Thank God and
  2. Pray for others you know who are tempted. Remember that the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective, as James wrote.
- B. If sexual sins are a temptation and/or if you have committed such a sin,
1. “Flee from sexual immorality,” Paul writes to the Corinthians and to us. (V. 18)  
The verb is in the present imperative Greek tense which means to do so continuously and repeatedly.
    - a. We know where we’re vulnerable; for the Lord’s sake, let us not play with danger. The wise person thinks ahead; as much as possible avoid letting dangerous situations even occur.
    - b. Avoid flirting. Many misunderstand mixed messages.
  2. Remember we are created by God with a natural attraction to the opposite gender. When a sexually mature man and woman (including teen-agers) are together alone, there is a dynamic that is present which, if naively ignored or manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally, can and often has led to disaster.
  3. Turn to the Lord for help.
    - a. Rely on him who will provide all you need to overcome temptation. A few chapters following our text for this morning Paul wrote, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so you can stand up under it.” (10:13)
      - Remember, you are not an independent contractor, you belong to God who loves you and bought (redeemed) you at a great cost to himself. (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20) He wants to help us; pray for him to help overcome temptation when it arises, and keep on asking!
    - b. The Lord understands. As we read in Hebrews 4, “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (vss.15-16)
    - c. If you have fallen into sin, repent and remember Jesus’ gracious words to the woman caught in adultery, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:11)
    - d. Commit or recommit yourself to obeying the Lord.
    - e. Commit or recommit yourself to practicing the spiritual disciplines, especially
      - 1) reading Scripture daily
      - 2) praying for all involved and affected by your decisions and actions. For example, if you are sexually attracted to someone who is married, pray

also for his or her spouse and for their marriage. Pray, and not just once, for God's help to overcome the situation.

- Pray also for the holiness and purity of the church, that we all may witness for Christ with holy lives that honor and glorify him. The world is watching us to see if what we say is genuine and authentic, i.e., backed up with actions. (1 Peter 2:12)
4. If you're a teen-ager with raging hormones, follow the model of Joseph, who was likely a teen-ager himself when the beautiful wife of Potiphar, propositioned him repeatedly when no one was around.
    - Remembering who he was he said, "How...could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" Follow his thinking and what he does as in chapter 39 of Genesis; ignore the portrayal in Webber and Rice's *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*.
  5. Turn to others for help and be open to help from unexpected sources.
    - a. Paul often told the churches to "encourage one another and build each other up." (E.g., 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
    - b. He told the Corinthians to "submit to [those in the church who were mature] and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it." (1 Corinthians 16:16)
    - c. Sometimes God's people have to admonish one another (e.g., Colossians 3:16) so as to avoid sharing in one's guilt (Leviticus 19:17b), but it should be done always in love (Ephesians 4:15).
  6. Much more could be said on this subject.
    - For those of you who would like to join me to discuss this sermon, to hear more, or to document what I am saying, I invite you to meet in Room 260 next Sunday at 9:30. It'll be in the calendar in the *resources* section of your worship folder next Sunday.

## CONCLUSION

- A. Let all of us pray for the holiness and purity of the church, the people of Christ called to be holy, set apart for being his witnesses, effectively backing up our words with corresponding deeds.
- B. Remember whose you are, and that you belong to him who paid a high price to redeem you from slavery to sin.
- C. Therefore, honor, glorify, God...with your body.