

Called to Purity 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Sexual immorality is rebellion against the gospel, but Christ's death and resurrection provides hope for those who are enslaved by it.

Disclaimer: This passage discusses some mature themes related to sexual immorality. It is not graphic, but may not be appropriate for children under 10.

Illustration: 2013 Gallup Poll – American attitudes about sex have dramatically changed in the past decade. There is increasing acceptance for pornography, premarital sex, teenage sex, and homosexuality. Surprise: The biggest increase in approval is among the 55 and older crowd, NOT among the young. A majority are now OK with what used to be out-of-bounds sexual behavior.

We tend to think that we are *avant garde*, or that these issues are new. But the culture of Corinth, to whom Paul wrote this letter, wasn't too much different.

- Prostitution was legal, and considered acceptable for married and unmarried men.
- The church in Corinth had a man who was sleeping with his mother-in-law, and they apparently had no problem with it.
- Homosexual behavior was generally accepted, which is why Paul also addresses it in this letter.
- Paul discusses "*porneia*," a word that broadly refers to any form of immoral sexual behavior. Although they didn't have the same type of pornography we have today, Paul likely would have included it under the umbrella of "*porneia*."

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 addresses sexual immorality head on, and explains why it is out of bounds for those who believe in Jesus. Paul roots his exhortations in the gospel itself, and in fact argues that sexual immorality is a form of rebellion against the truth of the gospel.

It is not merely a bodily issue, but a spiritual issue. And the antidote is not willpower or legalism, but a reminder of the gospel.

What Paul emphasizes is that Jesus died for our sin and then rose again. For those who believe in Him, we have an eternal destiny that involves resurrection and eternal life. So our bodies and spirits belong to Him. If you don't believe that, this passage calls you to do so to receive life. If you do, this is a sobering reminder that you belong to Jesus.

Among us, there are many who are engaged in various forms of sexual sin. Some might literally be engaged in prostitution or adultery. Others are knee deep in pornography. Others are practicing homosexual behaviors. Some of you are unrepentant, while others are trying desperately to stop. The way to find purity is to immerse yourself in the gospel, and to seek help. There are no "private" sins, because they affect the body of Christ and those around you.

Sexual sin has consequences that threaten our relationship with God and with others. But purity has benefits that draw us closer to both. In a culture full of temptation, the way to avoid impurity is to saturate our minds and hearts with truth about Jesus. That's what Paul does in 6:12-20. He tells us the consequences of sexual sin and reminds us of the truth, that God has purchased us with Jesus' death and resurrection.

I. Sexual “freedom” is really slavery (12).

The Corinthians were arguing that “everything is permissible.” This is a statement about rights. Much like our own culture, they believed that nobody ought to be able to tell them what to do or not do.

Does this sound familiar: “I have a right to do what I want with my own body!” Nobody can tell me what to do. “I should be able to love whom I want to love, with no input or interference from anybody.”

Illustration: Dolly Parton – “I think everybody should be allowed to be who they are, and to love who they love. I don’t think we should be judgmental.”

She represents the current ethic of our world, and that of the Corinthians also.

Much of what we call the “sexual revolution” was about personal autonomy. We tried to separate sexual choices from authority structures like church and family, so people could do what they pleased without any consequences (supposedly).

Some right now, hearing this, are angry about “those people” out there. Maybe you’re angry at those “liberals” who are ruining the country. But before you go there, consider this: Paul was writing this to Christians, not to the culture. It was Christians who had the immorality problems he was concerned about.

You might bemoan the changing values of our culture, but you still look at pornography on your own time. You still want the freedom to pursue entertainment with autonomy, even if that entertainment is sexually explicit. By doing so you affirm sexual immorality, even if you don’t practice those acts. You resist accountability and say it’s nobody’s business what you do or look at or listen to in your private time.

“Everything is permissible, but I will not be mastered by anything.” Paul says that sexual freedom is actually slavery. You think you are in control, but you are actually a slave.

Illustration: Rats in boxes given the opportunity to press a lever and activate an electrical current in the brain’s pleasure center. They will press the lever as much as 700 times in an hour, until they die from starvation or exhaustion. They start in control, and end in death.

I’ve seen it with sexual sin over and over. People start down that path, convinced that the rules and warnings are just meant to restrict. They are increasingly addicted and unable to stop. What they thought brought them freedom leads to slavery.

God doesn’t want us enslaved, because Jesus died to set us free from sin. It saddens and angers Him when we’re enslaved to sexual sin. There is a way out, through the Spirit’s power, but first you have to recognize:

II. Sexual behavior is a spiritual issue (13-18).

The Corinthians tried to separate bodily issues from spiritual ones.

-“It doesn’t matter what you eat because food and the stomach are not eternal.”

-“Therefore, it doesn’t matter how you conduct yourself sexually.”

They were right that the specifics of what you eat are not a huge spiritual matter (Mark 7:15-18). They were wrong that sexuality is the same type of issue.

Illustration: This argument from lesser to greater doesn’t work. Antoine Yates kept a tiger in his Harlem apartment. Just because a fish tank is OK doesn’t mean a tiger is. Qualitative difference.

The consequences of sexual sin are different and more severe than eating too many cookies. Food passes through you and leaves. The damage done by sexual immorality is worse and lasts longer.

Excuses: "Sex doesn't define me. It's only bodily." Like saying that swallowing poison doesn't make you a bad person. True, but it's still a BAD idea.

"Porn or sexually explicit movies are only entertainment and don't affect my spirit."

The Scripture disagrees strongly. Paul explains that the body is not intended for immorality but instead for God. Why?

- Our bodies belong to God through Jesus.
- Our bodies are reserved for resurrection. In other words, they're eternal. Jesus rose again, and so will we. The Spirit lives in those who believe in Jesus and is the "claim" God has on us. So the body is a temple of the Spirit, reserved for resurrection, and not for immorality.

So you CAN use the body for immorality, but that's not what it's FOR. Just as crayons can be used to mark up the walls, that's not what they're made FOR.

Sexual sin is a denial in practice of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Even if you believe it in your heart and mind, even if you're a Christian, when you practice sexual sin you are acting as if you don't believe it.

Illustration: In the Gallup poll, the least-approved of behavior overall was adultery, or extramarital affairs. More than 90% of those polled reject it. Why? Because people know that if you're already united to one person in a commitment, you don't unite to somebody else.

Paul says here that we are permanently united to Jesus in a sort of covenant. Because of His death and resurrection, and because of the Spirit, imagine that you are "married" to Christ. So to unite yourself to somebody else in sexual immorality is a violation of that covenant. It is a deeply spiritual issue.

He goes on to say that every other sin is outside the body, but sexual immorality is a sin against one's own body. What does that mean? It's not that other sins don't affect the body, but that the union of the Spirit and the body make sexual sin different.

You are united with Christ and claimed for him, but in sexual sin you unite with another person. You sin against the body in the sense that you take the body that is meant to be linked to Jesus and connect it sinfully with somebody else. In that way, you insult the Spirit and deny with your actions the resurrection you've been claimed for.

Bottom line: Sexual sin is deeply spiritual. Your sexuality affects you in ways that go beyond the mere physical, because it involves a bonding with somebody else in a very close and intimate manner. Even in pornography, you are opening up deep and sensitive aspects of yourself to sin. That doesn't happen when you eat too much candy or even drink too much beer. You don't unite with substances in the same way you do with people.

There is no such thing as "casual" sexual sin. You know that. Sex in marriage is a reflection of the love and faithfulness of Jesus (In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul argues strongly in favor of marital sex). Outside of marriage it is not. It's a sin, because it offers bodily promises that it doesn't keep in commitment.

Illustration: "Language of the Heart" by David Wilcox

III. Sexual Immorality is a Rejection of God's Authority (19-20).

Paul's final point is that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit and you have been bought with a price. You belong to Him, therefore your body doesn't belong to you.

So sexual immorality is a rejection of God's authority over your body. This goes back to the first point in some ways. When I insist on absolute rights over my own body, then I reject the authority of God. It's that simple. Sexual immorality is about who owns us.

If you believe in Jesus today, you should know that you are not your own. You've been purchased by God.

Illustration: Imagine somebody stayed in your home, and when you returned it was a nightclub. But it's your house, not theirs! That would be a violation of the borrowing agreement.

When you use your body for immorality, you are violating the agreement you have with God through the Spirit.

It's time to own that your sexual sin is a rebellion against God. There may be all kinds of reasons you engage in sexual sin, whether adultery or premarital sex or pornography. Maybe you're addicted. Maybe your family was tough. Maybe you were hurt, so you now hurt yourself and others. There are reasons, but no excuses.

You have the chance now to stop the cycle of sin and rebellion. It is not easy, but it is possible! Paul says it in 6:11 – some among the Corinthians WERE engaged in homosexuality and sexual sin, but they've been cleansed and sanctified by Jesus.

Conclusion and Application

You may feel trapped, like it's hopeless. The road out of sexual sin is difficult and arduous, but not hopeless. The resurrection and the power of the Spirit offer hope. What can you do?

-First, remind yourself of the truth. You belong to Jesus (6:19-20). Your body will be resurrected if you believe in Him (6:14). And further, the Spirit of God can empower you to do what is right (**Romans 8:11**).

“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” (v. 12 – “So then, we are under obligation not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.”

God is very good, and gives you the power to change. But you are responsible.

-Second, ask for help. Come and talk to a pastor. We can help you with some resources. If you're too shy for that, search out online resources like *Pure Online* or visit *Celebrate Recovery*. There are many resources out there, and there are men and women finding victory over sexual sin.

Sexual sin will damage your relationship with God and harm your relationships with others. But there is victory and hope in Jesus.