

*Glorifying God in the Body*  
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 1 Corinthians 6. 9-20  
 St. Michael's – Jan. 17, 2021

You may have noticed that when it comes to sexuality, most people and societies trend in one of two directions. Either we're unrestrained pagans, or we're uptight prudes. Either we're licentious libertines or we're anxious Victorians.

In contrast, the Bible offers us something radically different and better than either of these approaches. And that's where we're going today. We're going to see how physical intimacy can be a way of glorifying God. Do I have your attention yet?

Now in the West we've been trending in the pagan direction since the 60's. And yet the church is still in Victorian mode. Shhh, don't talk about it. You know when's the last time you've heard a sermon on this? And yet, it's everywhere in the Bible. From cover to cover the Bible is incredibly frank. So if you give a seven-year old a Bible they're going to read about it. Or if your child has friends who watch television, they're going to hear more juicy details than you can imagine. The question is not whether we should teach our children about this, the question is who is going to do the teaching. Pagan culture or the Church?

And the sobering thing is that if we fail to give our children a biblical perspective, we're condemning them to paganism by default, and they'll miss out on the glories of one of God's greatest gifts.

The apostle Paul teaches us three great truths in our passage.

1. Sin is serious
2. Sexual sin is uniquely destructive
3. There's only one lover who can give us true joy.

First, sin is serious. Paul begins by pulling no punches. In verse 9 he gives a litany of ten different sins: 'Don't you know that adulterers, thieves, drunkards, etc. will not inherit the kingdom of God. Don't be deceived,' Paul says. Why does he say 'Don't be deceived?' Because the human heart will always minimize sin. We'll excuse it, we'll rationalize it. We'll revise the moral landscape. You know, 'that's not thievery, that's just good economics. 'That's not immorality, they're just in love.'

In 1973 the famous psychiatrist Karl Menninger wrote a book entitled *Whatever Became of Sin*. Now mind you, Menninger was not a conservative Christian. And yet this was his thesis. He wrote, *I call for a revival of a conscious sense of guilt and of repentance...in short, I call for a revival of sin. And what should be the good of that, you ask? Why do we need more breast-beaters...Why not a no-fault theology, no one to blame?...Things just happen. Whoops. Alas... [Because] When evil appears around us, and no one is responsible, no one guilty, no moral questions are asked, then there is in short nothing to do, so we sink to despairing hopelessness.*

In short, minimizing sin leads to hopelessness. And so, Paul provides some smelling salts. 'Don't you know the unrighteous will not enter the kingdom of God.'

Basically, Paul says, 'Examine your life.' Conduct a fearless moral inventory. Are you consistently giving yourself to these sins? If so, you may not be a Christian. As Jesus said, you'll know the tree by its fruit.

Now I want to be clear, Paul is not saying that a Christian who sins should question their salvation. Of course we sin. We slip, we succumb. The apostle John says, 'If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves.' But there is a distinction between a consistent unrepentant lifestyle, and a struggling Christian, and Paul is saying 'Pay attention.'

Fortunately, after this warning, Paul continues hopefully. Verse 11: *'And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.'*

Paul celebrates the change that's happened, imperfect though it is. I'm reminded of the words of John Newton, author of Amazing Grace, 'I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be...But still I am not what I used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.'

Yes, we need to celebrate God's grace, even as we take sin seriously. And with this foundation laid, Paul now drills down into one particular sin that's especially destructive, sexual immorality. Point two.

Paul begins by quoting his opponents in verse 13. 'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.' Essentially some Corinthians are arguing that physical intimacy is simply a natural appetite. When you're hungry you eat. When you're amorous, you hook up. In the novel, 'A Picture of Dorian Gray' the evil Lord Henry says, 'What a fuss people make about fidelity! Why, even in love it's purely a question of physiology. It has nothing to do with our own will.'

But no Paul says, you're wrong 'The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord...God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.'

Paul responds to the libertines, with the power of the resurrection. Because of the resurrection we can't treat our bodies this way. Because Jesus rose from the dead, the human body is forever hallowed. And what we do with our bodies has cosmic significance. In short, matter matters. And Paul now gives a case study showing the significance of our bodies.

Verse 16: '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."'

Paul goes back to the very beginning. Genesis. 'The two will become one flesh.' Tim Keller points out that the word 'flesh' does not just mean body, but 'whole personhood.' And so what Genesis is telling us is that when a man and a woman come together it's not only a physical union, but also an emotional and spiritual one.

God created physical intimacy as a way for human beings to express love. Not Hollywood love, but Biblical love. Love as total commitment, the unreserved giving of one's entire self. This is the love we find in the Trinity as the Father, Son, and Spirit are eternally giving themselves to one another. This is Christ, 'Who loved us and gave himself for us.' Made in the image of God, our physical intimacy is meant to reflect this kind of unreserved and permanent love.

And this is why intimacy outside of marriage is so incredibly wrong. It's self-gratification rather than self-giving. You may give yourself physically, but you're not committing, you're withholding the rest of your life, emotionally, spiritually, economically.

You know, a lot of sins are sins of degree. I ate too much, I drank too much. But this sin is the exact opposite of what God intended. It's a monstrosity. Not only a perversion—a twisting of God's design—but an inversion, a dark parody of God's perfect will.

But what's shocking, is that Paul says this comprehensive union, this melding of beings, happens even when we don't intend it to. Even the most casual liaison forges a 'one flesh' union of body, mind, and soul.

Over the years I've spent a lot of time with guys in distress because their marriage was struggling. And often the reason is because they're haunted by past relationships. Old memories. Old images. Old feelings keep popping up and wreaking havoc. They're still experiencing the one-flesh union that was forged.

CS Lewis puts it this way. 'The truth is that whenever a man lies with a woman, there, whether they like it or not, a transcendental relation is set up between them which must be eternally enjoyed or eternally endured.'

In a similar vein, Mike Mason writes, 'The most casual of liaisons may be like some great submarine earthquake, sending its slow and unfathomable shock waves not only into every corner of the lives of the lovers...but throughout the entire nexus of family and friends, extending even to the unborn and...future generations.'

In short, there's no such thing as casual coupling.

I'm currently reading *Anna Karenina*...and Tolstoy got this profoundly. The novel is essentially the tale of two couples. Anna and Count Vronsky are committing adultery. Kitty and Levin are trying to live with integrity. And it's remarkable how it plays out.

Anna and Vronsky begin their relationship with just a little flirting. It then moves to infatuation and temptation and adultery, and then total enslavement. Anna leaves her husband and son and her life disintegrates. But still, as she looks back she feels, quote 'Such as a man might feel who when in danger of drowning had shaken off another who clung to him. That the other was drowned—of course it was wrong—but it was the only way of escape and it was better not to recall such terrible details.'

You see how she minimizes and justifies? She's no longer simply satisfying an appetite. She's completely deceived and in bondage.

Now many of us have histories we're not proud of. What do we do? How can we be free? Well first, we need to stop deceiving ourselves and address the sin. We need to call it what it is. We need to confess it to other people and God.

It's actually right there in Tolstoy. Before Kitty and Levin are married, Levin gives Kitty his diary documenting past liaisons. He feels it's his duty to honor her in this way. Now doing this causes each of them tremendous pain, but ultimately it leads to healing and joy.

And I've seen this same thing with guys I've counseled. As they confess and repent, they're liberated from these memories. Because the truth will set you free. And so if you're struggling, please, talk to a priest.

It's not easy, it can be quite painful. But as one psychologist observes, '[This kind of] pain is simply dysfunction leaving the body.' And the only way we can grow, the only way we can be healed, is through radical disclosure and repentance.

So sin is serious. Sexual sin is uniquely destructive. Where do we go from here? Point three, 'There's only one lover who can give us true joy.' The key is verse 17 'He who is joined to the Lord becomes one Spirit with Him.' The secret to living a pure life is not prudery. It's not quenching our desires. But rather, it's finding such fulfilment in Christ, that everything else pales in comparison.

It's like when you start drinking really good IPA's, it ruins your taste for lesser beers. When we truly experience union with Christ...these maudlin temptations don't have the same pull.

And when I say 'union with Christ,' I don't mean in some ethereal or intellectual sense. I mean in a 'one flesh' kind of sense.

In Ephesians 5 Paul writes famously, 'Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. The two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound and I'm saying that it refers to Christ and His church.'

Yes, marital love was invented by God to give us a glimpse of Christ's love for us. Jesus is Great Bridegroom, waiting for his bride. Waiting for the wedding supper of the Lamb. As Keller points out, this is why Jesus never married. Because he was already engaged, to us.

And what this means is that even the most spectacular conjugal experiences of this world are merely signposts pointing us toward the love of Christ.

As Pope Benedict wrote, [Erotic love is meant to provide] not just fleeting pleasure, but also a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns.'

This is why there won't be marriage in heaven – because everything that physical intimacy points to – joy, surrender, union, will be perfectly fulfilled in our relationship with Christ.

How many of you have ever been in deeply in love? If you're sitting with your spouse you might want to raise your hand. How many of you experienced that as a warmth in your heart? Take that seriously my friends. It's pointing you to something.

Do you remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus? Do you remember what they said after they met the risen Christ? 'Did not our hearts burn within us?' Yes, even in this life we can taste that love.

In 1652 Lorenzo Bernini sculpted one of the most famous sculptures in the world, of St. Theresa of Avila. She was known as the Doctor of Prayer because of her prayer life.

But the strange thing is that when you look at the sculpture and the expression on her face. It's not an expression we'd normally associate with prayer. No, it's an expression we'd normally associate with conjugal ecstasy. How dare Bernini portray a nun like this? But actually, Bernini was sculpting from Teresa's own writings, specifically a passage in her autobiography that describes an encounter with God in prayer.

She wrote, '[I was] all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it.' Yes, as David addresses God in the Psalms 'In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.'

My friends the truth is that one day, we will see the Bridegroom as He is. And he will look on us with such love and tenderness, like no groom in this world has ever looked. He will wipe away our tears. And as we fall into his arms, that embrace will wash away a lifetime of suffering.

How do we know Jesus loves us like this? That we're not just imagining it? Verse 20. 'You are not your own, you were bought with a price.' The language here is of a prisoner of war being ransomed. Christ proved his love by purchasing us with his blood.

At the end of the movie *The Last of the Mohicans*, there's an amazing scene. Cora, Heyward, and Hawkeye have been captured by the Huron Indians. They're prisoners of war. And the Indians decide that Cora is to be executed. But Heyward, who is in love with Cora, but has been spurned by her, negotiates to take her place. And the last we see of Heyward is of his arms outstretched, screaming in agony, as he's burned at the stake.

My friends, on the cross, Jesus burned with that kind of love for you. The love of a bridegroom. The love that casts out fear, that breaks every chain, that heals every hurt and memory. And so in a world of so much sin and heartache, run to Him, commit yourself to Him, holding nothing back. And you will find the only joy that satisfies. Let's pray.

Thank you Father for your Word. Thank you for your warnings. Give us courage to come clean with our sin. And give us faith to run into your arms. That we might know your joy. For Jesus' sake.