

Bring Bible and Bagels

Josiah transition and Hunger for the Presence prayer time Thursday this week, cuz Wednesday is Valentines day.

This week, we are going to be talking about sex and sexual immorality. Not because I picked the subject, but the subject picked me. As we head through 1 Corinthians, it is just the thing that is next in the text. And if what is next in the text is all about sex, it is my reflex to use it not as a flex or a pretext – and I hope you are not vexed.

In fact, it is a part of our subject matter for the next four weeks. Two weeks on morals and sex, one week on marriage and sex and one week on singleness. So if you have kids and you'd rather them not be exposed to the subject matter, now is a great time to discover our fantastic children's ministry! Or at home, a great video in the other room from right now media.

Let me just start today by reading the text from 1 Corinthians 5.

5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. ² And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? ³ For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. ⁴ So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵ hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,^{[a][b]} so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? ⁷ Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister^[c] but is sexually

immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

¹²What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.

Alright! Well, we can see the definition of “That messed up church” right on this page. Some people think that sexual immorality is a new thing in the church or in the culture. Nope. In fact, the first two verses bring up a ‘case in point’ – A man is sleeping with his Father’s wife. Probably a step mother. Now, I have been in church leadership for over 30 years and this is one even I have never encountered. And the wacky thing is they seemed to somehow be proud of this guy! So, that is just weird to me.

But here is something I do get. Sexual immorality hits all kind of people in all kinds of places. It happens in businesses, and schools and government, and neighborhoods. It even happens in the church.

The scandals hit the headlines so clearly.

- The Catholic priest abuse scandal caused grieving nationwide.
- The Southern Baptists had an expose two years ago that demonstrated not only occasional cases, but systemic problems and overwhelming cover ups that make the stomach churn.
- Closer to home, it has hit the Christian and Missionary Alliance. One district superintendent in Ohio was found to have been living a double life having sex with men for many years. We had an international evangelist named Ravi Zacharias who was a towering intellect and a brilliant communicator from India. After he passed away it was found that he was engaged in prostitution and abuse of women in massage parlors that he was a part owner.

One of the hard things of serving on the National Board of Directors is that these kinds of cases fall to the board to handle – both the publicity and the discipline as well as the pastoring and where appropriate, the restoration.

As a part of the implications of this, we did a national survey of all of the CMA pastors who were disciplined for sexual sin in the past ten years. And while it does happen, it was less than 1% of all pastors in a ten year period. That means of 4000 licensed ministers, 3960 were NOT disciplined for any kind of sexual immorality. And I am just grateful for the protection of God on our movement. But no movement is totally pure.

There is deep grieving that goes with this. First of all, because there is a disingenuous nature to it. People who seem one way on the outside... and even have a thriving are

actually living a double life. It can make you suspicious of other people and even cynical about faith in general. An avalanche of people who found out about this behavior have left the church in a wave. And who can blame them?

The sexual immorality is there... and the church in many cases has not dealt with it well.

The spiraling effects are obvious and heartbreaking.

- **I grieve for the victims.** Women, children and some men who have been abused by awful people who masquerade as righteous. They are attracted to church ministry because it gives them cover for their decadence. This is why the Bible says so often to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.
- **I grieve for the kids.** Kids who looked up to adults as teacher and leaders and models of virtue only to have their bubble burst and wonder about people, leaders and God.
- **I grieve for the outsiders.** People in our culture who look at the church and say "See, they are no different, except the hypocrisy of claiming to be better, but not being better at all!"

Now the good news is that Paul addresses this for two chapters. The church is called to a higher purpose, a higher connection to God and that SHOULD result in different behavior. For two chapters. So, this week and next week, I get the necessary, but unenviable task of talking about sexual immorality and how the church should respond. And can I say, I am so glad that this happened in Corinth so that we can get some good perspective on how to deal with this today.

Sexual immorality It is actually reported that there is **sexual immorality** among you,

So what does Paul mean by sexual immorality? In the Greek, this word is **Pornos/porneia**. You can imagine what word we get in English from this Greek root. But in ancient times, there were no illicit websites or dirty magazines. So the translators do a good job saying 'sexual immorality.'

Now a Jewish person would instantly go in their mind to **Leviticus 18** – the list of sexual behaviors in the Old Testament that were outlawed. This language was aimed at men, but goes both ways as you can infer. It included having sexual relations with:

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| • A close relative | • Your sister or half sister | • Your sister in law |
| • Your mother | | • Your wife's sister |
| • Your father's wife (step mom) | • Your daughter or granddaughter | • Your neighbor's wife |
| | • Your aunt | • A man with a man |

- An animal

Basically, if you are not married to them, don't have sex with them. And, while two unmarried people is not covered in Leviticus 18, it is covered elsewhere. The general teaching of the Bible is sex is designed as a very good thing for one man and one woman in a lifetime relationship. Sex was made for procreation and for pleasure. It is a spiritual experience that transcends physicality. It is beautiful and a part of what it means to be human. When it is good, you have a profound sense "I was created for this!" Sex outside of the marriage context is outside of God's good plan.

In this case, the guy violated the "Father's Wife" – or stepmom – clause.

Apparently, they were proud of this activity. We don't know why from the text, but we know what Paul says – you should have put him out of the fellowship. At least for a time. Why? Because of all the people who get hurt by this – the kids, the church, the culture, the reputation of God. Guys, this is a formula for a disaster of multiplied sin that just destroys lives and shipwrecks churches. So Paul says to put him outside of the fellowship. AND...

Hand him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh

I can't go much further in the text without explaining this one:

⁴So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, ^{[a][b]} so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

OK, so what in the world is "Hand this man over to Satan?" Are we pronouncing a curse or judging his eternity? Well, we can tell by the context of verses 2 and 3 that essentially that means to put him outside of the church fellowship. It does not mean that the church is determining this man's salvation or sending him to hell. Only Jesus has the right on that level of judgment. But it is up to the leaders of the church to have these difficult conversations – either repent, or you can't be a part of this family. When you are excluded from the Christian community, you lose that protection, the synergy, the life of community and you become vulnerable to Satan in ways that you are not in the church.

People have often asked "Have the elders ever done this at CCC?" And the answer is – both pastors and elders have engaged in difficult conversations about all kinds of moral issues – including sexual immorality. In my 17 years, we have never excommunicated someone because one of two things always happens. Either A) they confess and change their life, so there is no need for excommunication. Or B) they leave CCC and go to another church. We would do so in some cases, but it has never been necessary to date.

But what about that phrase "Hand this man over to Satan *for the destruction of the flesh.*"

Flesh = Sarx = sinful nature. That word flesh is sarx, which is usually translated ‘sinful nature’. Again, it is a word in the Greek with two meanings. So, I don’t think that Paul is saying – call on Satan to give this guy a skin disease or STD. He is saying – put him outside of the church – where Satan rules – so that he will live the consequences of his sinful nature, which is inherently destructive.

This makes the most sense because of the second half of the sentence – so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the LORD. The goal of church discipline is always restoration. For a person who is repentant, there is always a time that they are removed from leadership... so they can be restored. For a person who is not repentant (they don’t change), there is a putting out of the fellowship with hope that they will be saved and restored to community.

So, you might say, I see my situation on that list of sexual sins. What should I do? Let’s just take the clearest situation: You are married and in an affair. Here is my advice:

Decide today to stop – right now. Before God. If you came to church today asking God for a sign – this is your sign. Stop the affair. Break it off today and separate yourself from the person permanently. Don’t go back, text, flirt, snap, tweet or communicate in any way. End it.

Or, let’s say you are an unmarried couple living together and sleeping together. I have had a dozen couples come to my office in this situation over the years. Some are engaged, some just dating. Every time, my encouragement is the same: You should either decide to get married or stop playing like you are. The statistics are really clear on the dramatic failure rates of marriages that started by people living together. Every Christian, and secular source agrees on this. In fact, a study by Rosenberg and Roesler said the number one predictive factor of a divorce is if a person was married and divorced already. Number two? If you lived together before marriage. 48% MORE likely to be divorced if you live together first.

But if you want to honor God with your relationship, live separate and be celibate until marriage. In all of my counseling, the couple every time has said “for financial reasons, we can only make it in one apartment/house”. Thinking THAT would stop me. So, I have my standard line. “Oh, I know a handful of families at CCC with big empty nester houses that would be glad to let one of you stay for free until you get married.” So, after that, one of two things happens. They either: admit that it has nothing to do with money and that they just want to sleep together – thank you for your honesty... or, and this is most of the time... they say “I actually have parents, grandparents, or a friend who would let me stay with them. I

can do that until the wedding day.” And I love that. It is great to see them choosing a life-giving option for their future.

The key here is to honor God with your bod. Have lots of sex if you are married. It is a privilege, a joy and a command. If not, save it for marriage. If you didn't save it, God has a plan that includes forgiveness and healing.

Purity Culture and how that is messed up

One of the interesting ways that the pendulum swung the other direction in the past 20 years is what is now referred to as ‘purity culture’. It was a movement within the church to help young people to live lives of sexual purity in a culture that has gone kind of crazy sexually.

So there were purity retreats, purity rings and curriculum designed to sway kids into staying away from sex until married. I think that this was a well intended culture trying to protect kids from potholes that could have bad consequences for their lives. People in their twenties, though, often speak of the damage of purity culture with a degree of cynicism that surprised me. Purity pledges, purity rings, purity balls and Joshua Harris’ book “I kissed dating goodbye are some of the culprits. In fact, my kids were talking about it – and I said “wow, I am glad that you all were raised at CCC where those extremes were avoided.” They looked at me and explained what happened in some seminars in our own student ministry in the past. They had each experienced a talk, or a seminar, that had an illustration structured like this:

BAGEL – This is your heart. Every time you are sexually active with a boy/girl, you give away a little piece of your heart. And then when you get married, your heart is ruined like swiss cheese. Is that what you want to give your future wife/husband?

But if you stay pure until you are married, your sex will be forever beautiful, fulfilling and if you are lucky – crazy. You give them the whole bagel and your are doing it God’s way... and he will reward you with great sex.

But here are some problems with purity culture.

- It is inconsistent with the gospel. Here is the truth. If you have been sexually active, it is not irredeemable! Our gospel is that Jesus forgives and heals and changes. You can have a checkered past and an amazing future. Sexual activity does not wreck you for life.
- Men and women can walk away feeling their bodies are bad. And this can leak into marriage for decades to come – a sense that sex is bad or our body parts are shameful. This can have a dramatically negative effect on self esteem and marital

The path in the middle is to lean into the spirit. Confess our sins freely. Allow the life of Christ to course through our veins. And when you lean into the Spirit, who is your life, then the righteousness of Jesus flows easily and that yeast works through the whole loaf. The bottom line is that your body, your sexuality is an incredible gift from God that has immense power to build and immense power to destroy. WE have the power of Christ living inside of us so lets lean into the living Christ so that our bodies will work with him.

We have ministries for sexual brokenness. Men of integrity is for guys who have blown it in the sexual environment, but want to pursue the life of Jesus. Counselors at Citycare can walk you through your brokenness. But it always happens hand in hand with Jesus in community and not on your own. Jesus path is life and healing and wholeness, not condemnation and isolation.

Music Here

With all that said, God's best plan is to keep sex in a one man, one woman, lifetime commitment. You avoid all kinds of pain – like STDs, unwanted pregnancy, missed expectations and broken hearts. Because I love you and God loves you, he wants you to avoid that pain. At the same time, I want you to know that if you do miss the mark in your sexual past or present, our God redeems and heals in powerful ways. As a church we stand for BOTH – the healing of the broken and a life of God-honoring righteousness. May God give us the grace to actually live it out.