

A Hunger for Holiness - Sexuality

INTRO: Up to this point in our study on holiness we have looked at various aspects regarding holiness. To be honest, many people in the church do not take holiness very seriously. We are not marked by the kind of obedience to God's Word that we as God's people really should be. So we have tried to define the target of holiness - what it is and what it is not. We have tried to look at our true motivation as well as some false motivations regarding holiness. Too often we fall back onto a false position of "holiness is impossible" and it allows us to leave too much room for not taking the pursuit of being like Christ very seriously. We all seem to know we are sinners, which is good, and the gospel tells that too us. But we then forget the other half of the gospel that we have been made alive to God, dead to sin, and adopted into His family. The image of God that was marred in us by the fall of man is now being restored and we are holy. It's as if we start the Bible in Genesis 3 with the fall of man - we are sinners! However, the Bible does not define us by Genesis 3, the Bible begins in Genesis 1, and we are defined as being image bearers of Christ! It is about time we lived that way!

TRAN: So up until this point, we have not really dealt with specific areas of sin in our quest for holiness. Partly because it can be easy to pounce on people for the many ways in which we do not live up to our being holy. We don't pray enough. We don't memorize the Bible enough. We don't do enough for the poor and disaffected of this world. It is easy to make every sermon about falling short of holiness.

Yet, today we will pick up an area I think Christian's have compromised far too frequently; so much so that it has become engrained in our culture, and in the church to the point that we don't even realize how much we have compromised. The area of sexual immorality.

I. The problem

- A. It would take me all of about two seconds to convince you that we live in a sex saturated society
 1. It's on billboards - literally
 - a) Each time I go to Chicago I pass signs for some adult store on the way
 - b) The corridor from MI to IL in IN has billboard after billboard for "gentlemen's clubs" - which I always think to myself, "what and advertisement for your state. If this is all someone knew about IN, what a thing to advertise."
 2. It's in the movies we watch, the music we listen to
 - a) I told TJ in preparation for worship that the topic of the sermon was sex

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- b) Not many worship songs on that topic - unless we go secular
- 3. Youtube, Netflix, social media
- 4. You name it is out there
- B. But this message is not about how our culture is saturated - it is about us inside the church, and how we may be compromising God's standards regarding sexual immorality
- C. In the OT, when good kings would come to power, they would often rid the land of Israel of the idols and false religion
 - 1. But even the good kings would not always remove the "high places"
 - 2. The high places were locations in Israel where people would do sacrifices and rituals like other nations
 - 3. They were a symbol of compromise in Israel
 - 4. And they were so common in Israel, so a part of the culture that even the good kings did not think to take these places down
- D. Sexual immorality is one of the "high places" to us in the church today
 - 1. We fail to see how much the world has made this so common that we are blind to it
 - 2. And I include myself in that "we"
 - 3. When Paul would list off sins that were not appropriate for Christians, sexual immorality would head the list almost every time
 - a) That makes sense when you understand that Paul was working with the Gentiles
 - b) They had no background in the sexual ethics God expected so when they came to trust in Christ, they had to accept a radically different sexual ethic
 - (1) And as you know, it takes time to change old habits
- E. Before we get under way, understand that this does have to do with our union with Christ that we talked about last week
 - 1. As we walk through, I think you will see why
- II. Flee sexual immorality - 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
 - A. The main idea is in v. 18 - "flee sexual immorality"
 - 1. Of course that means we really need to define the term
 - a) The Greek word is the word "porneia" - we get our word for pornography from it
 - b) It refers to the broadest category of sexual sin
 - (1) It is found in Greek literature to refer to adultery, fornication, prostitution, and homosexuality
 - (2) In the OT it occurs for any sexual practice outside of marriage between a man and a woman

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2. Perhaps a simple way to understand it would be this: what would make you furious or heartbroken if your husband or wife did that with someone else
 - a) Shaking their hand - no problem
 - b) Even a hug - not a problem
 - c) Maybe even a kiss on the cheek is acceptable depending in the depth of relationship
 - d) But if someone had sex with your spouse, or was naked with them - problem
 - e) These are all activities that are only appropriate for married couples
 3. So in the way the Bible understands it, sexual immorality is sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman
- B. What Paul says is “flee” all of that kind of activity
1. Don’t try to reason with sin, don’t experiment, don’t peruse, don’t test your resolve
 2. Don’t mess around, just run!
 - a) The man in Proverbs 7 hung around sexual immorality, listened to its call, and ended up losing his life
 - b) We are to get as far away as we can
- C. Now, the Corinthians appeared to be proud of their Christian liberties
1. Understanding this helps you understand several things in the book
 2. Back in verse 12 they seemed to be touting their favorite idea, “all things are lawful for me”
 3. But Paul fires back, they might be lawful, but if they enslave you, how freeing can they be?
 - a) This passage is a great example of not just trying to find a specific Bible verse to tell you when something is wrong
 - b) You might have freedom to do things, but if it ends up enslaving you, than it is not good and you need to run from it
- D. Something else to note in this passage is that our bodies belong to Christ
1. Nowadays it is popular, even culturally engrained that we can use our bodies sexually any way we want, and no one can tell us differently
 2. Yet God says, “The body belongs to me”
 - a) If we have been united with Christ, our bodies are not ours to do with as we please
 - b) They have been bought with a price, so we glorify God with our bodies
- E. Through our union with Christ, we are empowered for holiness
- F. But union with Christ also means moral responsibility
1. Look again at verse 15 - the argument is clear, and kind of shocking

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2. If we are united with Christ, then engaging in sexual immorality (Paul mentions prostitution specifically, but it could be any sexual immorality), engaging in immorality means we are dragging Christ into bed with us
 3. When we put our sex organs where they don't belong, you are putting Jesus where He does not belong
 4. If you can't picture Christ with prostitute, or sitting in front of the computer looking at porn, or sleeping around, then you shouldn't picture yourself there either
- G. So practicality folks - before we move on to another passage
1. The dreaded question of "how far is too far" - for ANYONE that is single and in the dating pool
 - a) I say that because too often adults turn off and think, "This is just for the kids. Listen up junior, Pastor's gonna lay some truth on ya"
 - b) It doesn't matter your age, this is for all who are in these circumstances
 2. So - how to set boundaries in "how far is too far"
 - a) First, the goal of ALL of your relationships is to glorify God
 - (1) Not see how close to sinning you can get
 - (2) We want to maximize our efforts to glorify God in relationships
 - b) Second, don't stir up love before it is time
 - (1) That may mean that hand holding is as far as you can go
 - (a) By the way that is not a sign of weakness
 - (b) It is a sign of maturity to recognize when you are getting turned on and drawing the line before that point
 - (2) It might mean the occasional hug is as far as you go
 - (3) Point is - don't do ANYTHING that stirs up those hormones
 - c) Third, a great rule of thumb is to treat all Christians in your life that you are not married to, as brothers and sisters in Christ
 - (1) This is not my original idea - Hiestand and Thomas suggested this is their book, *Sex, Dating, and Relationships*
 - (2) But scripture backs this up - 1 Timothy 5:1-2
 - d) Overall, understand that the Bible never gives the idea that there is a special class for people that are not married to act like they are married - even if they intend to marry
 - (1) Even if your dating commitment is one of being exclusive
 - (2) It is not one of permanence
 - (3) Without the promise of "I do" that is not a commitment
 - (a) Sad to say too many people do not view the "I do" as commitment either

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- (4) I have never heard a married couple say they regret not doing more before they were married, but have heard plenty that regret being sexually involved before marriage

III. There must not even be a hint - Ephesians 5:3-12

- A. This passage is pretty “in your face” and clear - there should not even be a hint of sexual immorality in your life
 1. And according to verse 5, if you live a lifestyle that is unrepentant, and give yourself over to sexual immorality, you will not be going to heaven
 2. This is serious stuff
- B. So it is not just that we shouldn't do these things, there should not be a hint of it in our lives
- C. Notice the other things that can go along with sexual immorality
 1. If you remember when we went through Ephesians, I told you that these other things were not specifically related to sexual immorality - which is what some commentators try to say
 2. But you cannot deny, with such broad categories these other things can fall into the area of sexual immorality
 - a) Obscene or foolish talk
 - b) Course joking
 - c) The words are specific enough to lead us away from a direct association with sexual immorality, but still hint that way
 - d) Most guys can remember the age they were when the “lockroom talk” hit high gear
 - (1) According to Paul, those things are out of place for Christians
- D. So what would these other things mean for us if they are “out of place” and there should not even be a hint in our lives
 1. What does that mean about songs we might listen to on the radio or our electronic devices?
 2. What about the things we laugh at, the commercials we see during sporting events, the innuendo in many TV programs
 3. Now, before you think I am some radical that is going to tell you to have no fun, throw out your TV's and sit in a tiny room with your Bible for the rest of your life
 - a) There are perfectly good movies and TV that deal with sin
 - b) To say that we can never read about sin, or watch a depiction of something sinful without sinning yourself is ridiculous
 - (1) If that were true, stop reading the Bible
 - c) However, I will also tell you that the Bible never paints sin in a positive light
 - (1) It never uses sin to amuse or tantalize

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- (2) It never uses sin to stir up hormones
 - (3) It never tries to make sin look normal, and righteousness look weird
- E. We do still need to consider what we place in front of us, and is it trying to paint the picture that sin is normal, and righteous behavior is odd or worse, wrong?
- 1. So if you walked in a room where two people were engaged in sexual behavior, you wouldn't sit down with a bag of popcorn
 - 2. That would be beyond perverse
 - a) So why do we think it acceptable it is on the internet
 - 3. If someone you found sexually attractive walked up to you dressed in a manner that left little to the imagination and asked you to stare at them, would you?
 - a) That's weird and creepy
 - b) But why is it acceptable when they are plastered on a billboard wearing those things
 - 4. Yet, if we are honest, we let things like that slide in the name of entertainment
 - a) I remember a guy that started to date a girl in my first youth group - his name was Glen
 - b) He and his girlfriend, Nicole (who eventually became his wife) along with the pastor's daughter and her boyfriend all assembled at the pastor's house to watch a movie
 - (1) I forget the name of the movie, but I know it was not anything that would be outlandish - and I was in another room altogether, so I did not see the movie
 - (2) There must have been a scene depicting something sexual in nature - it was a comedy so it might have been a scene making fun of guys responses to a sexy girl or something - not sure
 - (3) But Glen walked out of the room and said he could not watch any more because it would cause him to possibly lust
 - (a) Now this is a movie that is not some rated "R" thing with people getting freaky on screen
 - (b) It was probably rated "PG" and this scene may have lasted for 3 seconds
 - (c) But for Glen, that was too much and he desired to maintain his purity, rather than compromise
 - c) That is a challenging story

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- (1) It is a challenging story to me - how much have I allowed things into the culture of my home and life that I SHOULD BE concerned or even outraged over
 - (2) This is what I mean when I talk about the culture pressing us into its mold, and Christianity conforming to the culture
 - (3) Even in the little things like this, our consciences have been seared so as to not see the sinfulness of sin
 - (a) It has become so commonplace it seems normal
 - (b) But it shouldn't be normal
 - d) From Kevin DeYoung's book *The Hole in Our Holiness*, he tells a story of a group of his friends watching the third Indian Jones film
 - (1) There is the scene as Indy and his father are tied up that a joke is made about both men sleeping with the same woman
 - (2) It is meant to be funny
 - (3) He said that an older respected student said "Guys, they are talking about fornication and incest. It's really not funny."
- F. So what does this mean for us?
1. It means we really need to be attentive
 - a) With our family
 - b) With our Facebook
 - (1) I am astounded for what passes as funny, cute, or acceptable on social media
 - (2) From the language used in a post, to a meme that has sexual innuendo
 - (3) Too many Christians don't think through what they post and re-post
 - (a) I have saved pictures to my computer to repost simply because the place that posted them has foul language in their title
 - (b) Is it a big deal? Not necessarily, but if I re-post that, and people know that I am a Christian (not that I am a pastor, but a Christian), what does that tell them about Christ?
 - c) With our texts, tweets, and our hearts and minds
 2. Are we really different than our culture?
 - a) Sadly too many Christians have said to themselves, "We will not be as sensual as you, but we will watch you do it."
 - b) Paul said it in Eph. 5:12 - it is shameful to even mention what the disobedient do in secret
 - (1) So what Paul refused to mention, we see on every station
 - (2) What Paul refused to mention, passes for humor

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- (3) What Paul refused to mention, has crept into our lives and become commonplace
 - c) When it comes to sexual immorality, sin has become the norm, and righteousness has become at best passé, and at worst strange and out of place
 - (1) In short, Christians on the whole look like the rest of the world in many respects
- IV. Our true identity in Christ helps us in this area of our process of sanctification
- A. In Ephesians 5, the contrast is very clear
- 1. “Those who are disobedient” those who are in darkness
 - a) They have given themselves over to sexual immorality with reckless abandon
 - b) They walk in impurity because they are impure
 - 2. But those who “are light in the Lord”
 - a) Live as children of the light
 - b) We can see what the deeds of darkness are, what scars they have left, the damage they do
 - c) We have the ability to find out, and do what pleases the Lord
 - d) We have been united to Christ
 - (1) Declared holy - by God the Father, through the work of Jesus Christ
 - (2) We become Holy through the work of the Holy Spirit
 - e) Sexual immorality is not just wrong, it does not fit who we are
 - (1) We are light in the Lord - set free to please him
 - (2) Why would we walk back into the darkness and shadows ever again
 - (3) It is not who we are - we have been fundamentally and forever changed
- B. It could be easy at this point to become dogmatic or legalistic about how we live in light of this teaching
- 1. We could condemn all movies and TV and the radio
 - 2. But we do have Christian freedom, and that means every Christian has to choose for themselves how they will respond
 - 3. But what I want to encourage you to do is consider if your conscience is functioning at peak performance
 - a) Because the world is so saturated with sexual images, and stories, and behavior it is almost the air we breathe
 - b) Because we have been in it so long we don’t realize we are in Mexico City and the pure air of the Rocky mountains is available to us if we

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would just realize the quality of the air we are breathing and then make the changes

- C. Before we close, a quick word to anyone that is feeling terrible because of choices they have made
1. This has been a sermon that has been heavier on the correction, and lighter on the comfort
 2. Some of you may feel terrible over the sexual sin that you struggle with
 3. You hate the pornography that seems impossible to escape
 4. You regret things you have seen or done in your past and it feels like you can't escape your past
 5. You just feel hopeless
 6. The reality is there is hope
 - a) The gospel tells us we are cleansed
 - b) We have the Spirit to give us the power and strength
 - c) Christ can transform you
 - d) God can and does forgive (again, and again)
 - e) Turn to one final passage - 2 Corinthians 3:16-18
 - (1) I tell you on the authority of God's Word that when you came to Christ, you have been set free
 - (2) Even if it seems painstakingly slow God is changing you from one degree of glory to the next

PRAYER: For freedom, for relief from shame, and for focus on the glory of God.