

Sunday, January 22, 2017

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18)

We live in a time where fornication is considered to be normal, and you are a freak of nature if you are not engaging in it. We see and hear it in songs, ads, movies, books, TV shows, etc. You can't go anywhere without hearing people talk about it, whether that's school, work, restaurants, grocery stores, or any other place where people assemble. Children, spurred on by their wicked parents, are carrying the banner of fornication at younger and younger ages as time passes. One of my kids recently brought home an article from the middle school newspaper where a 12-year-old girl was expressing her outrage that she is not able to freely talk about her “sexuality” at school. Apparently, her teacher kept telling her to stop talking about that kind of stuff at school. She gathered comments from some of her fellow students, and most of them shared her outrage, saying that the only people who should be prohibited from speaking are the ones who say it's a sin! In the United States, around 50% of people have begun fornicating by the time they leave high school. That number jumps up to 84% by the time they hit their mid-20s. And by the time they are in their mid-40s, 95%-97% of people in this country have engaged in that activity. 80% of so-called “evangelical Christians” are engaging in fornication (and associated with that, 65% of women who get abortions identify themselves as “Christians”).

You may think that going back to the 1950s (before the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s) would yield some substantially different numbers, but just under 90% of people in this country were fornicating at that time. The main difference is that back then, people gave lip service to saying that fornication is sinful, and there was a stigma associated with it...but the vast majority of them were doing it anyway. Today, the vast majority of people are still engaging in fornication, but now they are saying that there's nothing wrong with it at all, and it must be accepted and celebrated. There might be a small minority of people who actually intended to remain celibate until marriage, and just fell into sin, but most are doing it proudly and as a manner of life.

Of course, the sin of fornication was prevalent during Biblical times as well. Jesus preached against it, and it was a frequent topic in the Pauline (and other) epistles. Wherever you have human beings, in whatever period, you will have fornication. It doesn't matter how many people are doing it, though - it is still a sin against God and a sin against your own body. It is a sin that will keep the children of disobedience out of the kingdom of God, and a sin that brings the wrath of God on those same people (Ephesians 5:5-6). But it is particularly repulsive and pernicious when it is introduced into the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is a favorite

device of Satan to do so. Please don't think that you are immune to falling into this sin. This may be a sin that some people are more prone to, but it is a temptation that could hit anyone. Our young people are especially in danger. But anyone of any age could fall into such a sin - remember that David was no spring chicken when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. Once the sin has been committed, you can't un-ring the bell. You may go into a situation with no intention of committing the sin of fornication, but things can unravel quickly. Hence the commandment to "flee fornication!" Like Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife. I know that the blood of Christ is sufficient to cover this (or any other) sin, for those who repent. Nevertheless, it is a sin that will bring great sorrow, and will give the enemies of Christ occasion to blaspheme. You'll recall what Nathan said to David: "the Lord also hath put away thy sin" but "by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." (2 Samuel 12:13-14).

So, let's start with some terminology. When we talk about "fornication," what is commonly meant is any type of illicit sexual activity involving unmarried people (including sodomy, incest, etc.), as opposed to "adultery" where at least one of the parties involved is married to a different person. But it can also more generally mean any type of illicit sexual activity, including adultery. And, it can also frequently be taken in a spiritual sense to mean idolatry (the marriage covenant represents the union of Christ and His Bride, the Church, so any other sexual coupling represents a union with a strange god). It all depends on the context. The Greek words that we see in the New Testament that are associated with fornication are " pornos " (fornicator or whoremonger), " porna " (harlot or whore), " pornyuo " (to commit fornication), and " porneia " (fornication). And there are several other related words that we see in the scripture which I'd like to spend a few minutes on:

aselgaa - lasciviousness, wantonness, filthiness, licentiousness. In his exposition of Galatians 5:19, Gill defines this as "all lustful dalliance, everything that leads to uncleanness, as impure words, filthy gestures, and the like."

akatharsia - uncleanness, moral impurity. Again, in his exposition of Galatians 5:19, Gill defines this as "a general name for all unchastity, in thought, word, or action; and may here design more especially all unnatural lusts."

epithymia - lust, concupiscence, desire, a longing after something (usually something that is forbidden). This is what is forbidden in the commandment "thou shalt not covet" (Exodus 20:17, Romans 7:7).

pathos - in this context, it means a depraved or vile passion, inordinate affection, lust.

Obviously, there is some overlap here in what these words mean. The one I'd like to focus on is "epithymia" because this is the one that made Paul understand that it was impossible for him to keep the law of Moses perfectly. You can read about that in Romans 7:

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust (*epithymia*), except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet (*epithymeo*). But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence (*epithymia*).” (Romans 7:7-8)

You understand that the law of God doesn't just condemn behavior...it condemns your very thoughts and inclinations. Not just your well-formed covetous thoughts, but the very first movements of lust in your mind. Not just those sinful thoughts that you dwell upon, but those that are fleeting. If someone asked me to pick a verse that best described the depths of the depravity of the human heart, I might pick Romans 7:8. The basic message of the verse is, “God told me not to lust, but sin dwelling in me used that commandment to stir up every type of unlawful desire.” Being told not to do something causes a depraved heart to rebel and want to do it all the more.

And incidentally, in these verses, you see how deep into the cesspool that this modern society has sunk. On the one hand, we have the everlasting Word of God saying “thou shalt not covet” (that is, “thou shalt not lust after unlawful things”). On the other hand, we have people who define themselves primarily by what they lust after. They say “this is who I am.” They call it “sexual orientation” which is a fancy way to say “lust.” This society has made “lust” a protected class. They glorify it. God's Word for it is that your lust is going to end in death. It's nothing to be proud of. It's nothing to glorify. Sinful lusts result in open, outward sin (like fornication), which, when finished, will bring forth death:

**“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”
(James 1:14-15)**

So our job is to mortify our members:

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.” (Colossians 3:5-6)

You're supposed to “mortify your members.” There's a lot that could be said about that, but suffice it to say that “mortify” means “to put to death.” You're supposed to abstain from these things, and even when the first motions of these sins arise in your heart, you're supposed to kill them. You're not supposed to cherish them and chew on them like a sweet morsel. You see here that these things result in the wrath of God. This is talking not only

about eternal wrath in hell, but His wrath as displayed in temporal earth judgments. When we see the wrath of God on earth, it is because of these sins. So, when someone says, “it’s not a sin because we’re not hurting anybody – we’re consenting adults,” that’s a Satanic lie. It is a sin, and you are hurting people. You’re causing the wrath of God to come on the children of disobedience as a result of your proud sinning, both now on earth and for eternity. And when we contemplate that, without grace, we would be in that same boat...we would be the children of wrath...it should cause us to all the more mortify our members.

I mentioned earlier that introducing fornication among the people of God is one of Satan’s favorite devices. One of the best examples of this is what happened with Balaam.

“But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.” (Revelation 2:14)

You can read the story of Balaam in Numbers 22-24. In a nutshell, Balak the king of Moab hired Balaam to curse the children of Israel, but God told Balaam he couldn’t curse them, because they were blessed. Balak tried repeatedly to get Balaam to curse them. He took him from high place to high place, hoping that if he looked down upon the camp of Israel from a different place, he’d be able to curse them. But God turned it into a blessing. The problem is that Balaam was greedy. He really wanted to curse the children of Israel so he could receive money and honor from Balak. So he hatched a plan. And the plan was to use the daughters of Moab to get the men of Israel to commit fornication, with the end goal of getting them to join those women in worshipping the false god Baalpeor. You see that nothing is more common than for fornication and idolatry to go hand in hand. You can write the script of some whorish woman vexing you with her wiles with the intent of getting you to forsake God and joining her in whatever form of idolatry she’s engaged in. The Bible doesn’t give us the particulars of what Balaam said to Balak, but we do know for sure that Balaam counseled him to get those Israelites to commit fornication. A couple of the Targumists describe the substance of their conversation like this:

“Come, and I will counsel thee, (speaking to Balak,) go and set up inns, and place in them whorish women, to sell food and drink at a low price: and this people will come and eat and drink, and be drunken, and will lie with them, and deny their God; and they will be quickly delivered into thine hands, and many of them shall fall.”

“Balaam, the wicked, gave counsel to Balak, the son of Zippor, to cause the Israelites to fall by the sword; he said to him, the God of this people hates whoredom, cause thy daughters to commit whoredom with them, and ye shall rule over them.”

Whatever it was exactly that he said to Balak, we see the result in Numbers 25:

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor. And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand...Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, even that was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites. And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Vex the Midianites, and smite them: For they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake.” (Numbers 25:1-9, 14-18)

**“And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.”
(Numbers 31:15-16)**

This was no small matter - we're warned repeatedly about this incident and this false doctrine of Balaam throughout the scripture. It's explicitly said to be an example to warn us against fornication:

“Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.” (1 Corinthians 10:8)

As mentioned earlier, Paul speaks of fornication in a lot of his epistles. He includes it as one of the attributes of the wicked men and women in Romans 1 (Romans 1:29). It is included as one

of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19). He says “let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (Ephesians 5:3). He says they will not have “any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” (Ephesians 5:5). He says “For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). He says it is “contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” (1 Timothy 1:9-11). He says that “God will judge” (that is, “condemn” or “damn”) them (Hebrews 13:4). But in no epistle does he speak about it in more detail than he does in 1 Corinthians.



The city of Corinth is located on the isthmus that joins the main part of Greece and the Peloponnesos (the peninsula at the southern end of Greece). At its narrowest point, the isthmus is about 4 miles wide. To the west is the Ionian Sea, and to the east is the Aegean Sea. In ancient times, Corinth was a major port city – it was part of a trade route and a crossroads between the east and the west. (One of the ports to Corinth was called Cenchrea, which we see in the scripture). Merchants would go through Corinth as a short cut to avoid following the more hazardous route to the south. Today, there is a canal there to join the two seas. In ancient times, they constructed a

paved railway called the “Diolkos” so they could move ships across land from one sea to the other. It also was notably the site of the Isthmian Games, which occurred in the 2nd and 4th years of the Olympiad (i.e., the year before and the year after the Olympic games). Paul is probably alluding to these games in 1 Corinthians 9 when he talks about running races and pugilism. Due to all the commerce and people constantly coming and going, Corinth became a very wealthy and decadent city. Different cities in these times would worship different gods and goddesses (e.g., Diana of the Ephesians – Acts 19). The primary goddess of Corinth was Aphrodite, the goddess of lust. Just outside of the city was a mountain called Acrocorinth, which housed the temple of Aphrodite. Part of the worship of this goddess involved having sexual relations with one of the 1000 or so women who were kept there for that purpose. Interestingly, the term “korinthiazomai” (“Corinthianize”) was used in the ancient world to refer to fornication. Gill suggests that the name of the city itself could have come from the multitude of whores living in it – “corai entha”, meaning “here are girls, or whores.”

The city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC, and rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. In short order, it became a major city with a population of around 600,000 diverse people. They

quickly returned to the same licentious and immoral practices that existed before, making Corinth one of the filthiest cities around at that time.

It is on this backdrop that Paul visited the city of Corinth in the early 50s AD. He stayed in Corinth for a year and a half plus “a good while” (Acts 18:11,18), so he was probably there for a total of around two years when the church there was first established. This is where he lived with Aquila and Priscilla and worked as a tentmaker. After reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue, they rejected him and blasphemed, and he said, “Your blood *be* upon your own heads; I *am* clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). So he set up shop to preach next door in the house of Justus. Shortly thereafter, Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed. Paul was ultimately brought by the Jews before Gallio’s judgment seat, and Gallio summarily dismissed the charges, saying it was not a matter for a Roman court to judge. Perhaps the most wonderful and amazing thing is that in such an evil city, God had called out “much people” (Acts 18:10) and created a church there.

Even so, the church that was gathered there had a lot of problems and required a lot of instruction from Paul. Paul seems to have written multiple letters to the church in Corinth – at least four. We have two of those in our Bibles. The occasion on which the epistle of 1st Corinthians was written was actually multiple things: 1. Those of the house of Chloe had reported to him that there were contentions among them (1 Corinthians 1:11); 2. He was responding to a letter that they had written him asking questions (1 Corinthians 7:1); 3. Stephanas and Fortunatus had visited him in person to pass on the particulars of the affairs of the church (1 Corinthians 16:17); 4. It was commonly reported that fornication was among them (1 Corinthians 5:1).

They had allowed fornication to enter the church. And not just any fornication, “such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.” (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). They were proud! What did they have to be proud about? Maybe they were proud about how tolerant and merciful they thought they were being in allowing that folly to continue. Of course, they repented, and exercised church discipline like a church is supposed to do. And, the man involved in the sin also repented, which is, of course, the hope and intention of church discipline.

Living in Corinth, the people in the church faced licentious behavior on a daily basis, kind of like we do. (As our brother Brent mentioned a few sermons ago, there is a “spirit of whoredom”). And in fact, a great number of the people in the church had, before they were saved, participated in that licentious behavior:

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

In those circumstances (that is, living in a sea of whoredom), there is a great danger if the members of the church are not being circumspect, and they allow sin into the church. I’m talking about impenitent, proud, dangerous, troublesome sin:

“Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there *be* any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” (Hebrews 12:14-17)

We can’t underestimate the danger of the lure of the world, which is why we have repeated warnings against it throughout scripture. Knowing that they were living in a filthy city, seeing the folly going on with the man fornicating that is addressed in chapter 5, and understanding the danger of backsliding into former sins, Paul spends the last part of chapter 6 warning and explaining why fornication is such a heinous sin, especially when it is committed by the people in the church.

“Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.”

(1 Corinthians 6:13)

It was apparently a common notion that fornication was just as indifferent as eating food. So Paul dispels this notion. The belly may have been made to consume meats, but the body is not for fornication; it was created for the Lord. The purpose of our bodies is to be devoted to the service of the Lord, consecrating ourselves to living soberly, righteously and godly. And the Lord is also for the body. He sustains, keeps and provides for our bodies. He has redeemed us, body and soul, and has sanctified us. We should not, therefore, devote our bodies to fornication.

“And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.”

(1 Corinthians 6:14)

By the same power that the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, we will be raised from the dead. The newness of our lives is tied to that holy and glorious resurrection of Christ (see Romans 6:4). And our new bodies will be glorious, powerful, incorruptible, and spiritual. We have a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ, that we will likewise be resurrected to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away (1 Peter 1:3-4). How unworthy, then, is it to use these bodies, which will be risen by the power of God, for fornication!

“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.” (1 Corinthians 6:15-17)

We are, along with all of God’s people, united to Christ. Our bodies are members of Christ. He’s the vine; we are the branches (John 15:1-8). How abhorrent and abominable to take one of the members of Christ and join it to a harlot! If we are really joined to the Lord, we are one spirit with the Lord. It is what proper, Biblical marriage is a symbol of – the union of a man and a woman, called by the same name (“he called their name Adam” – Genesis 5:2), for a lifetime. It is a close and intimate union, where we are united in will and thought and intention. It is the Spirit of God who illuminates us, gives us faith, and is our Comforter and the earnest of our future glorious state. It is a union that surpasses anything that we could have with a person on earth. And you’re going to sever that bond with the Lord God and replace it with a union with a harlot?

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18)

“Flee fornication” is a commandment of God. It’s not a suggestion...it’s a commandment. Flee means to escape from danger. You’re not supposed to hang around and debate or parley or reason about it. You’re not supposed to delay so you can test the fortitude of your virtue. You’re supposed to flee! Immediately! Shun all occasions of it. Flee from any temptation that could lead to it.

We hear commonly that “no sin is worse than any other sin.” It is true that any sin is sufficient to damn you to hell, and please understand that I am not minimizing the severity of other sins. But if it’s true that no sins are worse than others, then the distinction that Paul is making in the second sentence of this verse is meaningless. It appears from the verse above that fornication is in a class all its own. It doesn’t mean that fornication is the only sin where the body is involved – we know from experience that that is not true (e.g., drunkenness, theft, lying). This is a sin that is not only the instrument by which the sin is committed, but it is the

object against which you are sinning. You are using your body to sin against your body. And in some peculiar way, your body is more dishonored and defiled by this sin than any other sin. You've taken your body, which is a member of Christ, and joined it to a harlot. Albert Barnes says: "Perhaps no single sin has done so much to produce the most painful and dreadful diseases, to weaken the constitution, and to shorten life as this. Other vices, as gluttony and drunkenness, do this also, and all sin has some effect in destroying the body, but it is true of this sin in an eminent degree."

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost. This is where God has chosen to set up His temple. You are defiling the temple of God when you commit fornication, and turning it over to profane use. You are provoking the Holy Ghost to abandon the temple, as defiled.

Further, you don't own your body and your spirit. They belong to God. You have no business giving your body over to a harlot. We are paid for with a price, not with silver and gold, "but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). You are therefore obligated to devote yourself to God, and not treat that price that was paid as if it was worthless. He redeemed the church and declared her to be His spouse, and we are therefore bound to preserve a holy chastity towards Him. Our job is to glorify God in our bodies and spirits...fornication is the exact opposite of that.

To close, there are a couple lists of the damned that we find in Revelation. Please remember that fornicators (whoremongers) are on both these lists:

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8)

"For without *are* dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." (Revelation 22:15)

I love you. Amen.