

Dealing With Sexual Guilt

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

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INTRODUCTION:

The gospel changes lives. Not only does it do this, but it has this impact on every aspect of our lives, which includes our sexual identity, our sexual lives. This fixes a number of problems, but if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit it also creates some new problems, some new temptations.

THE TEXT:

“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 Cor. 6:9-11).

OVERVIEW:

The unrighteous—continuing unrepentant—will not inherit the kingdom of God. This is *basic*; Paul addresses it in the form of a question. Don’t you *know* this? It was a good question to raise at Corinth, which was renowned in the ancient world for its immorality, and in the ancient world that was no small achievement. But the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom (v. 9). The entire first half of the illustrative list that he works through consisted of sexual sin in various forms. First was fornication, which was a broad term covering all kinds of sexual uncleanness. Second was idolatry, which was closely identified with sexual sin. Third was adultery. Fourth was passive homosexuality, the sin of being a catamite. Fifth was sodomy (v. 10). The second half of the list branches out—thieves, covetous men, drunks, revilers and extortioners will not inherit the kingdom either (v. 11). Don’t think that sin is *only* sexual sin. And then comes the word of hope. “And such were some of you” (v. 11). What made the difference? You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Holy Spirit.

SO HERE’S THE PROBLEM:

In the first century, sexual purity (in the Christian sense, with the biblical definitions) was virtually unknown. As a lifestyle, to the average pagan it was beyond comprehension. This meant that the new Corinthian believer, who had been baptized and had joined this new fledgling movement, did not need to be embarrassed about his *past*. If anything, in terms of peer pressure, he was going to be embarrassed about his future sexual purity, not his past immorality. Our situation is quite different—even with the deterioration of standards since the sexual revolution of the sixties, the unbelieving world still has an active memory of how things used to be. You don’t shake off a millennium or more of Christian civilization in a couple of decades. And within the evangelical subculture, sexual standards are still clearly taught and generally understood (with the problem compounded by biblical standards gone to seed).

Of course, we are not faulting Scripture for doing this, but this *does* create a new problem for us. Whenever standards of any kind come to a fallen race, it creates the problem of hypocrisy and/or hidden guilt. The more serious the standards are (Heb. 13:4), the greater the temptation. Overt hypocrisy is a problem to address another time. For now, let’s consider the problem of hidden guilt for two kinds of people. The first is the person converted to Christ, or put right with Christ, later in life. But she comes to this point with a good deal of sexual baggage, and whenever she comes to church, all she can see are squeaky clean people who would chase her out of the church “if they only knew.” The second kind of person is the person who grew up in the church, with sturdy sexual standards extending in every direction and disappearing over the horizon. But knowing the standard and having the resources to fight temptation are two very different things, and the appearances make it look like no one else you know is struggling with this temptation—whatever it is.

FORGIVENESS IS COMPLETE:

In our text, the apostle Paul says of the Corinthians (a pretty raggedy bunch) that “such *were* some of you.” That past tense was made possible by God’s washing, God’s sanctifying, and God’s justification. This cleansing and the judicial imputation of Christ’s righteousness means that a whore can become a virgin, the pervert can be enabled to stand upright. As far as God is concerned, all your sexual sins are washed away. Nothing is out of His reach. Christ’s blood does not falter before certain sins.

CONSEQUENCES AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

There are two other relevant issues. The first is that complete forgiveness (which really is complete) does not necessarily erase all consequences. A woman can receive total forgiveness for her fornication, and after she has received that forgiveness, still be pregnant. A teacher of small children who is caught with a stash of child porn should be fired, but that does not mean that he is beyond forgiveness. Of course not. And a man can divorce an unfaithful wife without displaying an unforgiving spirit. These are consequences. Forgiveness means liberation from *certain* consequences, not from every possible consequence.

Accountability is a little different. Our practice of sexual behavior is and ought to be private, but the reality of our sexual expression is not to be private. We are connected to others. Fathers are responsible for the sexual purity of their daughters (Deut. 22:13-21). Husbands and wives have authority over one another’s bodies (I Cor. 7: 4). So real accountability is found in the God-given places, and not in a “small accountability group” of drowning swimmers, all clutching each other going down. At the same time, remember what we have emphasized before—no human authority is absolute. For example, if a father has been guilty of sexual abuse, it doesn’t make any sense to demand that his daughter have to confess anything to *him*.

Another example of necessary confession is when a couple get to the “tipping point” in a courtship. Simply apply the Golden Rule, but don’t kid yourself.

WHY WE NEED TO BE REMINDED:

There is no sin that a human being can commit that Christ cannot forgive, and forgive readily. That is why He came to die. But we struggle with this kind of sin more than with other sins. Why? Part of it is the set of cultural expectations we have developed, and which we *should* have developed (Heb. 13:4). But the second reason is that sexual sin is like getting pine pitch on your hands (I Cor. 6:18-19). Just like other dirt, it *can* be washed off, but you have to know how to do it.



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