

Week 5

Respect, Honesty, Truth and Love for Those Facing Lust, Pornography, Masturbation and Fornication

At Hope we often talk about **matter** and **manner** - this is where we're looking for unity, not uniformity of thought during these small group discussions. We should expect a range of thoughts on various topics, because our personality, experience, friends & family, upbringing, etc. all come into play as we shape our thoughts. Let's remember we all need Jesus and his grace is sufficient to cover each of us and our struggles, past or present.

How can we have a conversation that can honor God, the bible and each other?
Can we challenge ourselves to use this time to learn, listen and grow together?

? Has anyone heard of the Hays code?

"The Hays Code was this self-imposed industry set of guidelines for all the motion pictures that were released between 1934 and 1968."

Any idea what it would have prohibited?

Actual answer: profanity, nudity, violence. It also enforced rules around the use of crime, costume, dance, religion, national sentiment and morality. But it became best known for depicting married couples sleeping in separate beds (see: Dick Van Dyke or I Love Lucy)

Leader's Note: Our Bibles don't read like theology textbooks. We can't simply look up the chapter or page number on pornography. The Bible seeks to share the gospel story. As it relates to the wholeness of who we are before him, sexuality absolutely enters into the conversation. Just realize there might be a little more work involved as more than one passage is utilized and as questions are likely to increase due to the sensitivity of topics.

This week we will dig into the gospel versus simply rules when it comes to sin.

Free and Flee

1 Cor. 6:12-20

¹² "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

? The Corinthians were basking in the freedom that Christ provided. What is the reasoning put forward to Paul as to why such sexual actions are permissible? (In our English bibles, typically, Paul quotes what he would have heard from them and then follows those quotes with his responses.)

Possible answers: They believe that God had given them the right to do anything. In their minds, that speaks of freedom. There's a comparison made to stomach and food, which indicates a physical and temporal need for those things that will not last into eternity (God will destroy them). They appear to insinuate the same is true regarding sex. We have a physical need; sex meets that physical need. But that need will cease in eternity. So, they might say, live it up while this side of eternity because it doesn't matter on the other side.

? What is Paul's reasoning as to why the Corinthian believers are right to flee sexual immorality, whether it be lust, pornography, masturbation, fornication, etc.? (Notice less the direct command to flee in v. 18 or honor God in v. 20. Instead, try to understand the argument—the motivation and rationale as to WHY believers would flee.)

Possible answers: Paul replies that not everything that could be done should be done because it may not be beneficial or it could lead to being mastered by that thing. Instead of looking at it from the Corinthian perspective - bodily desire for sex and vice versa - Paul says our bodies are for the Lord, the significance of which is highlighted in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Do you hear that? Is it just that the body will be destroyed? No! Jesus was raised—bodily—from the dead! And so will we be!

We are saved for oneness to Christ. But to engage in sexual immorality is commensurate to becoming one with a prostitute. It is a type of spiritual adultery. Why? Because we belong to the Lord. He has purchased us with his blood. And sexual immorality, truly any sin, actually mimics the oneness which is to be reserved for Christ.

Sadly, sexual immorality counterfeits some of the commitment, union, connection, intimacy, pleasure, etc. that is reserved for marriage. And that oneness in marriage reflects what Jesus desires to have with his bride. Similarly to being united to Christ, the Spirit now lives within us, making us temples.

What's the Motivation?

Matthew 15:16-20

¹⁶ "Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. ¹⁷ "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. ⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

? How well do you think the Hays rules did at preventing the lewd and obscene behavior that was intended?

Possible answers: Given our current set of movies, TV shows, etc., it feels safe to say, "Not great."

? If it's the case that rules did not produce the intended results in Hollywood, why do you think churches so often impose rules upon their congregants? (dress code rules, dancing rules, drinking/alcohol rules, etc.)

Possible answers: On a positive side: they want to prevent sin or leading to the temptation of others; they want to help; they want to provide clarity; they want to inform; they believe people may not genuinely know what is or is not helpful, is or is not modest, is or is not beneficial; they don't want anyone to be mastered by substances.

On a negative side: they want to control; they don't trust their people; they don't trust the Spirit; they believe modesty and morality are principally external and visible rather than (what Jesus says) a matter of the heart

? The passage speaks of an alternative motivation—our relationship with Christ. How does our relationship with Christ motivate us, differently than rules might, in our battle with sexual immorality in all its forms?

Possible answers: For the Christian, it always comes back to what God has done. Nothing compares with it. In today's passage it reminds us we were bought with a price. What was the price? The death of God's own Son. He is Emmanuel, God with us. And he shed his blood on the cross that we might be with him. He has demonstrated that he will never stop loving us now would he hold anything back; he gave it all. Which sin has ever promised and delivered on such a promise? None!

He has promised to never leave me, never forsake me! He has said he will uphold me and lift me up! He has invited me to cast all anxiety upon him because he cares!

How much greater are his promises than sin! How much greater is he than he that is in the world! How much greater is his capacity to overcome the challenges of this life!
How much greater our need for him!

? What would it look like to form accountability around our relationship with Christ, being motivated by him rather than just checking the box whether or not I broke a rule? What amazing promises is Christ continually offering us?

Possible answers: If I should have sought sin out this week, might I ask myself "why?" Why did I pursue? What was I hoping it would produce? Did I need peace that life's circumstances were failing to provide? Was I agitated by something a parent or boss said and I needed a release? Was I hurt by the words of a friend and that sin was an attempt to dull the pain? Why do we pursue sin? Is it not often for what sin promises to provide? But then it doesn't, right? And is not sin, at its base, our individual and collective failure to trust in God? To trust that he can provide peace amidst difficult life circumstances, to hear us in our anger, and to heal us in our hurts?

(Preaching the gospel to ourselves and one another in accountability might sound something like this.)

Jesus, I lament my past and ask you to help me this week. Should I face those temptations again, which I will, that I'd turn to you, the fount of living water. Should I be in want, that I'd come to your table to feast. Should I feel alone, that I'd reach out to you and to those in this group so I'd be reassured I'm never alone. Should I need help, I'd know that you are always available and capable to help me in my time of need. To you be the praise and glory, amen.

Real Life Scenario

A friend has confided in you that he has been watching pornography and wants your help to stop. Considering matter and manner, how would you initially respond, as well as continue responding to him?

Note: At Hope we often use the Why Ladder as a tool for conversations like this. The Why Ladder works by taking a proposition, idea, belief, or realization and examining it on a deeper level by asking the question, "Why?" This is done repeatedly to get beneath the surface of the initial idea, and move "down the ladder" toward deeper held beliefs and convictions that lie beneath the surface. The Why Ladder forces us to examine our internal beliefs that drive the internalized shame narratives, and it sets us up to interrupt those narratives. The best way to interrupt those narratives is to break them with gospel truth.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Preach the gospel to yourself. What does it look like to seek help from God and each other, on account of the gospel (rather than rules)? How can we specifically follow up with you this week?

? Dig deeper into the WHY which motivates you toward sin. In this next week, how can we help you seek to preach the truth of how Christ provides abundantly more than sin ever could.

Additional Resources

- *Mortification of Sin* by John Owen
- *Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard
- *Holier Than Thou: How God's Holiness Helps Us Trust Him* by Jackie Hill Perry
- *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk About the Power and Defeat of Sin* by Kris Lundgaard