

Sanctified Relations
September 6, 2020

Each year, around the world, people fall off of cliffs and die. They die because they go past the guardrail. They get too close to the edge and slip, lose their balance, or the ground under their feet gives way. At the Grand Canyon alone, 55 people fell to their deaths in 2015.

Guardrails are not suggestions. They are intended for our safety. In many cases rules, regulations, and laws are intended to serve as guardrails, keeping us safe. We ignore them at our peril.

Let us take driving for example. Driving can be fun. It is also dangerous. It is safest when we submit ourselves to the rules of the road. Those rules are designed to keep everyone safe.

The same is true of God's commands. God loves us. In his wisdom, he sets boundaries for our well-being and spiritual blessing. This morning we look at one particular subject of those boundaries, those guardrails.

I spoke last week about being sanctified. To be sanctified is to choose holiness. Holiness is a complete commitment of yourself to God. This is what the Christian is about. Christians are to live the process of learning how to devote ourselves fully to God. We are to be attempting to live fully devoted to God. And the Holy Spirit is in the process of changing us inside to enable us to live fully for God. This is what Paul wrote, that we should be sanctified.

Then he addressed two important subjects. We will look at the second next Sunday.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (NIV) Finally, brothers, 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. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

When it comes to sex, many look at what the Bible says as if God does not want us to have this pleasure. Nothing could be further from the truth. After all, where did sex come from? Well, like everything else, God invented sex. He did not have to make an actual physical union of a man and a woman to be the way for us to reproduce. He could have made us to reproduce more like fish or plants do. These involve not joining together and certainly no pleasure. Instead, God purposely invented a method of reproduction that involves intimacy and pleasure.

As the designer of sex, God knows more about it than anyone. And he designed it for marriage in particular to contribute to the life-long covenant union that he intended marriage to be. God

blesses it in marriage. There is a special joy that comes from sex within Christian marriage. As your pastor I want that for you. But it only comes by staying within the bounds of the guardrails God has given.

You may think you know enough about sex to ignore God's guidelines. But look at what God revealed in the Bible about sex.

1 Corinthians 6:18 (NIV) All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

The apostle Paul reveals that sexual sin is different than any other sin. It affects us in ways that no other sin can. He does not mean that no other sins harm the physical body. Several do bring harm to the body.

Maybe you have seen some of those recent TV commercials that feature people who lost their voice, their health, and their looks to smoking. They developed lung cancer, throat cancer, or one of the other conditions that smoking can bring on. If you are around alcoholics, you can see the damage that long term alcohol abuse can do to the human body. The same is true of those using illegal drugs. These obviously harm the human body. And they were common in Paul's day. He knew that other sins harmed the body.

So what does he mean here? He reveals that sex involves the whole person in ways that other sins do not. Sex involves a person's spirit, the inner you. It is not just a physical act that you can separate from the inner, spiritual you.

Lewis Smedes wrote, *"Nobody can really do what the prostitute and her customer try (to do); nobody can go to bed with someone and leave his soul parked outside."*

There is a connection between sex and a person's soul. Other pleasurable things do not have the same connection. They do not have the same effect on you. The pleasure you receive from eating your favorite dessert is different than the pleasure of sex, even if you are eating Better-Than-Sex Chocolate Cake. The thrill some people get from doing dangerous things, like jumping out of airplanes is not connected to their soul like sex is.

God designed the sexual experience to be unlike anything else on earth. Any other pleasure is different than sex. Any other experience is different from sex. Any other sin is different from sexual sin. Sexual sin affects you in ways you cannot know about ahead of time. It affects you deeply, on spiritual and emotional levels, not just physically. You can be forgiven of sexual sin, but the internal damage is often permanent.

God planned for sex to affect you deeply in your soul, not just in the body. God planned it that way to help cement the lasting relationship you are supposed to have with your spouse.

So despite what many in our culture want to believe today, there is much more to sex than a physical act. One who discovered this was Tim Stafford.

In the 1960's, Tim Stafford got roped into writing a monthly advice column for Campus Life Magazine. It was titled, "Love, Sex and the Whole Person." He admits he was no expert on sex. So he began reading as much as he could from both religious and secular sources. In addition, over the course of more than a decade of reading and answering hundreds and hundreds of letters from teens and young adults, he came to this conclusion: "I believe if you really want to get the most satisfaction out of being a sexual person... Christianity offers the best way of going about it."

(A Love Story: Questions and Answers on Sex, by Tim Stafford, Zondervan, 1977, page 11)

"All other sins" can be grouped together. Sexual sin is in a class all by itself. It is uniquely damaging to the inner you.

That is why Paul's solution is so strong. Paul cautions us to run from sexual sin.

1 Corinthians 6:18, 20 (NIV) Flee from sexual immorality...

... honor God with your body.

Run from such sin. Run, run, run. Get away. Don't hang around and allow temptation to grow stronger.

He reveals three reasons. The first we have already covered.

1) Sexual sin hurts you deep inside in ways no other sin does.

2) Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:19 (NIV) Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

Temples are to be clean and holy. Sexual sin pollutes the temple of the Holy Spirit.

3) Your body does not belong to you, but to Jesus.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV) You are not your own; you were bought at a price.

Jesus purchased you for God with his blood. Your body is not yours to do whatever you wish to do with it.

So, run from sexual sin. Don't dabble in it. Don't experiment. Don't litter your conversations with sex jokes and innuendos. Don't fill your eyes and mind with pornography. Don't see what you can get away with on a date.

As a dating couple, don't ask, "How far can we go"? The very question shows you are desiring to move toward sexual sin instead of away from it.

We must seek purity without compromise.

Anything less than pure is unholy. We must strive for purity with no hint of anything less. God taught this principle in the Old Testament Law. While we are no longer under the Law of Moses, there is a great lesson for us in the following passage.

Numbers 6:1-4 (NIV) The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.'

Let me clarify something. Do not confuse "Nazirite" with "Nazarene." Jesus was called a "Nazarene" because He came from the town of Nazareth. The word "Nazirite" comes from a Hebrew word, ***nah-zeer***, which means "to dedicate to God." Nazirites were Jewish men or women who dedicated themselves to God from regular life for a specified period of time and a specified purpose. It might be the rest of their life or it might be several weeks, month, or years.

Note that they were not to indulge in alcohol during this period of time. And this commitment was to be pure.

The point I want you to see is that there was to be no possibility of ingesting alcohol. The reason not to eat a raisin or a grape, whether the seeds or the skins, was because the fruit might have started to turn, to ferment, and thus to contain alcohol. Fermentation in the Bible is a symbol for sin.

The principle here presented by God was that if a person was separate to the Lord, there must be purity. They were to take no chances of ingesting alcohol during the period of their vow.

The same must be true of Christian when it comes to sex. Strive for purity. Do not see what you can get away with. Don't ask, "How far can we go?" But move in other direction.

We must pursue sexual purity as followers of Jesus Christ. The world is pursuing pleasure. And in doing so they are missing out on the spiritual joys of life in Christ.

"The curse of our culture is that physical pleasures are desired more strongly than spiritual joy." --- John Piper

There is danger on the far side of the guardrail. There is harm beyond the sexual boundaries that God has set for us who are his children. He wants what is best for us. Pursue this for yourselves.