

05 - Living in Light of the Covenants: Gender and Sexuality

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Scripture 1: (Gen. 2:15-25 ESV)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Scripture 2: (Rom. 1:18-2:2 ESV)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God

rightly falls on those who practice such things.

Scripture 3: (1 Cor. 6:9-11 ESV)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Sermon:

The third and final question related to the issue of Gender that we shall examine using the lens and foundation of Covenant Theology concerns godly sexuality.

Sexuality has become one of the most publicly noticeable issues wherein our sinfulness manifests itself in the contemporary worldview. Human sexuality was once the most private of concerns. It was kept out of the public eye for the sake of modesty and personal propriety, but now it has been elevated to become the culture's most important social value and the most important characteristic defining a person's identity. That is why Christians need to better understand God's good intention and purpose in creating us as sexual creatures. That is also why we need to consider how we may rightly respond to God's establishment and engage with a world that actively opposes His divine standard. We shall use the following three questions to help us think through this concern.

- Within the Covenant of Works, what did the LORD establish as the divine standard for godly sexuality and how should Christians respond to it?
- Having received the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, how should Christians respond to the LORD's redemption of our human relationships, and particularly in our sexual relationship with our spouse?
- Having received the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, how should Christians respond to the LORD's redemption of our human relationships, and particularly our sexual relationships, in relation to the world outside of the Church?

Many people incorrectly believe that the Covenant of Works was only concerned with the prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They assume that our obedience was only required in this one matter. However, when we consider the whole pre-Fall context, we recognize that by this singular prohibition the LORD also broadly prescribed the preservation and maintenance of everything else as He had established it. That is one of the implications contained within the command to *shamar* (Genesis 2:15).

Initially, Adam was prohibited from doing one thing and he was commanded to *shamar*: “to keep”, “to guard”, and “to protect”; God's creation. Adam was tasked to maintain and preserve the natural order. {He was not commanded to enforce stagnation or to prevent change and progress, since he was also commanded to *avad*; to work necessarily requires change.} But, when Adam chose to sin, he inflicted an evil and wicked change upon creation. Adam's sin damaged the created order by introducing brokenness and sin. Adam failed to preserve the world as it was. He failed to *shamar* it perfectly. He failed to “*keep it*”. Therefore, the whole creation groans and suffers (Romans 8:20-23), and ever since, humanity has struggled with our responsibility to *avad* and *shamar* the world because:

- God's creation has become broken, defaced, damaged, wrecked, and injured, yet it has not been destroyed.

- Our human nature as the “image of God” has become broken, defaced, damaged, wrecked, and injured, yet it has not been destroyed.
- Our relationship with the LORD God has been broken, defaced, damaged, wrecked, and injured, yet it has not been destroyed.
- Our relationships with one another have been broken, defaced, damaged, wrecked, and injured, yet they are not destroyed.

We use, abuse, and try to break every good thing that God has providentially given to us because of Adam's and our sin. We, the world, and our relationships are all in need of repair. Everything in creation needs to be restored and redeemed to the LORD's original intention and purpose. That redemption is what Jesus accomplished through His death on the cross for us and that restoration is what the Holy Spirit is doing inside each and every Christian, in the world surrounding them, and will do to the whole creation when Jesus returns. However, sin remains our problem, both our personal sins and the sinful nature that still remains within every confessing and repentant Christian. This latent sinfulness negatively impacts all of our different relationships but, it especially damages the intimate relationship between a husband and wife.

Aside from the absolute standard of perfect righteousness, the doctrine of (*ex nihilo*) Creation by the power of God's Word and, the providential love of God for creation alongside His special love for His people, the divine standard of marriage is the most clearly defined fact taught by Scripture. The LORD brought Eve to Adam, “*the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh..."*”, the purpose of which Moses and Jesus both explained to mean, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*” (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6), establishing between them the first marriage covenant {**identify and add the covenantal elements**}. This marriage was officiated and solemnized by the LORD, Himself before sin entered into the world, establishing it as the divine standard. Therefore, we may know and understand what purpose this relationship was created for and what its character is intended to be.

- The institution of marriage was established and created as a corrective act because it was “*not good*” that we should be alone. Together with the creation of woman, the establishment of marriage prompted the LORD to declare His finished work to be “*very good*” (Genesis 1:31).
- The institution of marriage was established for the whole of humanity, as a gift from God. Every human culture in history has recognized some kind of marital union.
- The institution of marriage was established by the LORD as being between one man and one woman (Genesis 1:27) and, through the written record of Scripture, was publicly published to the creation as the divine standard and natural order (Genesis 2:23-24). Although we might be tempted to refer to this divine standard as being “*normative*”, we should avoid doing so because that language is actually harmful since “*normative*” implies a permitted allowance of alternatives (non-normative). The divine rule of righteousness is always absolute and without permitted exception, because all deviance from that perfect standard is sin.
- The institution of marriage was established by the LORD to enable a man and a woman (Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Timothy 3:2) to “*be fruitful and multiply*” (Genesis 1:28). Creating them physically to reproduce sexually according to His natural design and divine purpose.
- The institution of marriage was established by the LORD to bind a man and woman together as *ezer's* (Genesis 2:18), for their mutual support in fulfilling their purpose to subdue the creation (Genesis 1:28). This relationship is to be characterized by their love and obedience (Ephesians 5:22, 25).

Established and instituted before Adam's sinful fall, marriage is a universal good for all humanity. By imbuing humanity with His image, equally as male and female (Genesis 1:27), and emphasizing their union by blessing this divine standard for marriage (Genesis 1:28), the LORD also prohibited every possible alternative or deviation from it. No polygamy (1 Timothy 3:2). No adultery (Leviticus 18:20). No incest (Leviticus 18:6). No homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22). No pederasty (1 Corinthians 6:9). No bestiality (Leviticus 18:23). The only permissible and divinely approved relationship wherein human sexuality is to be expressed, is within the bonds of a biblically defined marriage.

But, our sinfulness has corrupted the institution of marriage away from the divine standard and the sinful tendencies of our culture has removed sexual activity from its lawful place. Our culture's glorification of every form of sexual immorality is the continuing consequence of God's judgment and wrath against sin. But, while it was Adam's first sin that caused us to suffer this judgment, his root sin was actually not eating the forbidden fruit. His eating was the product of a deeper, more insidious, and less obvious sin. It was a particular type of sin that we are all guilty of committing. That sin is our idolatry of self, the ultimate focus of our selfishness. This idolatry is the cause for every other human sin, and especially every sexual sin (Colossians 3:5).

Every expression of sexual sin is the product of a person's selfishness. Sexual sins are the expression of our personal quests for self-gratification; of the devout worship of our own person above all others, especially over Christ.

The observable evidence of life's reality is that our internal sinfulness {original sin and corrupt nature (Psalm 51:5)} begets all of our actual sins {both our sinful inclinations and sinful activities (Matthew 5:27-30)}. Sin begets sin, in an ever worsening cycle of wickedness and depravity. Something challenging for us to understand and accept, but which is plainly taught in Scripture, is that our constant increase of sin is the LORD's judgment. Our worsening sinfulness is actually an expression of His wrath against sin. We experience and observe this in every sphere of life.

The Apostle Paul explains, “*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!*”. The expression that God “gave them up” appears three times within this passage and the Greek term it translates {*paradidomai*} comes from the context of judicial discipline and describes what happens between the passing of judgment by a judge and the application of that judgment's consequence; such as when a person just convicted in court, is given over to the Baliff and taken into custody to begin their sentence.

When Paul declares that “*God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...*”, “*to dishonorable passions...*”, and “*to a debased mind...*”, he describes God's punishment for sin. The LORD has condemned them to remain in their sin and to increase in their sinfulness. God removes from them His providential restraint against their sin. He opens the floodgates of their heart and allows their sin pour out unimpeded. God allows their totally depraved nature to further devolve towards utter depravity, rather than redeeming them, sanctifying them and restoring them to a state of righteousness according to His mercy and grace. God gives them more of the sinfulness that they think they want, proving the Greek proverb true, “Be careful what you wish for because you might be given it.” (*Aesop's Fables*).

But, what sin is so wicked as to justify such a terrible punishment? The idolatry of self.

“*...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...*”. That describes idolatry, the sin expressly prohibited by the first and second commandments. Yet all sins are not equally wicked and evil {although every sin equally deserves God's wrath and the penalty of death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23)}. Some sins are worse than others and some sins become worse through their circumstances (WLC 150-151). All idolatry is sin but, knowingly worshiping a demonic spirit is a worse sin

than worshiping a false idea, since a person may be deceived but, worshiping yourself is worse than worshiping a demon because every person knows that they are not God.

The Church has always believed that there are different degrees of sin. The Apostle John distinguishes between sins that “lead to death” and those that do not (1 John 5:16-17). The Roman Church teaches a difference between what they call “venial” and “mortal” sins {although their applied understanding of what effect these sins have is contrary to the plain text of Scripture; cite/quote Roman Catechism}, affirming a range of severity among sins. The Westminster Larger Catechism teaches (asks and answers) that, “Q. *Are all transgressions of the law of God equally heinous in themselves, and in the sight of God?* A. All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.” (WLC 150) before it lists out several examples (WLC #151).

Idolatry of self, which the LORD condemns as “more heinous”, is worse because “...*although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*”. They knew the truth but rejected it, preferring lies. They refused to worship the LORD as God, much less as God alone.

- Rather than trusting the wisdom and counsel of God, they trusted in their own reasoning instead.
- Rather than worshipping and trusting in the LORD who created heaven and earth, they worshipped what He created instead.
- Rather than worshipping the LORD, they worshipped themselves as god and tried to usurp the LORD's rightful authority.
- Every unregenerate person, in practice, worships themselves as their own personal god and lord of their life instead of the true God, the LORD: the source of life, the absolute Sovereign and Creator God, Jesus Christ.

The more heinous nature of idolatry of self is why humanity's present sinfulness is as bad as it is. It is why the evidence of sinfulness within our contemporary culture only gets worse. It stems from Adam's root sin, his idolatry of himself. By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam trusted his own wisdom rather than God's command. He honored himself above the LORD God. He tried to usurp the LORD's position and authority. He tried to assume absolute authority unto himself by rebelling against the rightful Sovereign. Therefore, in divine judgment, God gave Adam and all humanity over to our myriad sins, permitting us to be in bondage to them. However, He also gave us a promise and hope that this judgment would not be forever (Genesis 3:15).

Our contemporary culture's abuse of sex and human sexuality is the most commonly observable expression of idolatry of self. It has taken something intended by God to be preserved within the intimate and private relationship of marriage and has instead brought it to the forefront of public attention and focus. Presently, something sexually-related graces the cover of all our popular magazines; is present within about two thirds of television commercials; is somehow described, discussed, or alluded to in the lyrics of our popular music; is featured in daily news articles on multi-market news services; and is unavoidable on every social media service. Its featured presence is so prevalent, that its absence still attracts our notice and redirects our attention to it.

While sex and human sexuality are good when expressed in their rightful place and in the appropriate way, they may still be corrupted and become sinful if they are misused and abused. Just as all sins are not equal, likewise, all sexual sins are not equal. The severity of the sin depends on its degree of offensiveness and the harm it causes. The whole historical Church, under both the Old and the New Covenant, has universally agreed:

- that pre-marital sex or any sex outside of the bounds of marriage (fornication¹) is sinful because it transgresses God's clear intention and divine standard (Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 23-24, 28-29);
- that adultery and the violation of the marriage covenant is considered more sinful because of how it harms the spouse, the one with whom adultery is committed, and any children within the family (emotionally, socially, spiritually, and potentially physically) (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 22:22);
- that rape, forced sexual activity, or sexual abuse are considered still worse sins because of their harm (emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically) to the victim (Deuteronomy 22:25-27).

These three examples fall within a broadly defined category of sin known biblically as “sexual immorality” (Matthew 5:32, 15:19, 19:9; John 8:41; Acts 15:20; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:1, 6:18; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossian 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; June 1:7). The Greek term this expression translates is *porneia* {from which the term pornography is derived} and may be understood to encompass all forms of sexual sin, including those that are exceptionally heinous. Furthermore, beyond the simple, physically explicit use (Genesis 38:24), this term was used by the Septuagint translators, for when the prophets also described the individual and corporate faithlessness and spiritual adultery of Israel and her people (2 Kings 9:22; Hosea 1:2, 4:12; Micah 1:7; Jeremiah 2:20; Ezekiel 16:15), which helps to demonstrate, in part, why sexual sin is a worse sin and therefore deserving of greater discipline.

Having already explained how God gives sinners up to “*the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves*”, Paul's next statement helps us to better understand why and how our culture has compounded its sexual sinfulness and taken it to the extreme that it has.

“*For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.*”, where “*dishonorable passions*” describes the effect our sins should have upon us. If our hearts were right and good, then we should feel like we have dishonored ourselves when we sin. We should feel shame for every sin because sin is shameful. That was why Moses qualified the original disposition of Adam and Eve as being “*both naked and were not ashamed*”. {Their nakedness refers both to their lack of clothing and their state of openness and vulnerability with one another in their relationship.} Their nakedness was not shameful but, after they sinned they felt the need to hide themselves from the LORD's sight and they felt the need to hide and cover their exposure from one another. This need to hide was the product of their shame. God punishes unrepentant sinners by giving them over to their “*dishonorable passions*”. He allows them to desire and revel in their shame and abhor the state of righteousness which they should rightly be desiring, leaving them in an ever worsening state of misery that should cause them to want to repent.

The next logical step of humanity's devolution into “*dishonorable passions*” comes through us actively desiring and worshiping ourselves and our image, which lead to the sins contained within homosexual activity and inclination, “*For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another*”.

Homosexual activity contains the same sinful, worsening elements as other sexual sins but, escalates beyond them by being acts “*contrary to nature*” (Leviticus 18:22). Homosexual sins transgress God's natural order to sin against creation itself. Homosexual sin abandons and rejects the “*Dominion Mandate*” by refusing to “*be fruitful and multiply*” (Genesis 1:22). Homosexual sin escalates by their becoming “*consumed with passion for one another*” and leading to their ultimate destruction, as with Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19).

Meanwhile, as our propensity for sexual sin continues to increase in variety, the world has led humanity to make our sins even more heinous with the advent of trans-genderism. Presently, trans-genderism has become the ultimate expression of humanity's idolatry of self because it is the greatest deviation from the divine standard,

¹<https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/fornication>

with irreversible bodily mutilation and voluntary sterility. Not only is transgender sinfulness contrary to the divine standard, but it also claims that God made a mistake {as denial of divine infallibility} by creating a particular individual as either male or female. It elevates a person's subjective feelings and desires above the sovereign work and intentions of God. Transgender sinfulness attacks the Image of God inherent within humanity by attempting to erase the natural, physical distinctions between male and female. It confuses our gender roles and it impedes their function as it tries to thwart humanity's divinely given purposes. Even though a person's transgender sinfulness may be repented of, the physical damage has already been done and restoration has been made impossible through any human means.

But still, as we suffer under the tyranny of ever worsening sinfulness, humanity still does not “*acknowledge God*”. Therefore, “*God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*”.

Thus every sin a person might commit, is ultimately sourced in their idolatry of self; our individual, personal sin of selfishness. This idolatry is the corrupted spring from which our every active sin and sinful inclination flows. Idolatry of self is the besetting sin which every Christian most struggles against. Every corruption in the world and the consequences that follow from it, may be traced to someone's idolatry of self, but especially corruption within our relationships. It is a most difficult sin to mortify because of all the many ways it can express itself: under the obvious guise of narcissistic pride or subtly within healthy and lawful marriages by disrupting the intimacy of their relationship.

Since the LORD has established the divine standard of marriage as being between one man and one woman as part of His Covenant of Works, how should we faithfully respond to it?

We should honor the LORD with faithfulness inside our own marriage relationships. We should adhere to the the divine standard; modeling it before believers and non-Christians alike, demonstrating its rightness and its good benefit for everyone concerned. By modeling the divine standard and promoting its benefit, we shall encourage others to follow our example as we follow and obey God's command.

Secondly and ideally, we should work towards the reduction, minimization, and eventual removal of all public expressions of sexual immorality; being encouraged to perform the duties commended by question #138 of the Larger Catechism, “The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behavior; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel; marriage by those that have not the gift of continency, conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labor in our callings; shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.” Despite how difficult this is to do within our cultural climate, we should nevertheless, work within the spheres that we may positively affect such as within our homes and families through our example and choice of media we consume, or within any work spaces wherein we hold authority and influence.

Third, we should work to support and defend the biblical definition and standards related to the family. We should only affirm or recognize marriage relationships that follow the biblical standard². We should remind and encourage people that marriage is a lifelong commitment. Marriage is valuable and worth working to improve and preserve. We should recommend appropriate forms of marriage counseling, ideally with a trained Christian counselor, during times of relational difficulty, rather than hastening to divorce. We should only affirm justified, biblically reasoned divorces instead the common acceptance and promotion of “no fault” divorce by our culture.

²<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/10/us/southern-baptist-obergefell-same-sex-marriage.html>

Next, how should Christians respond to the LORD's redemption of our sexual relationships, through the power of the Holy Spirit, according to His Covenant of Grace?

First and foremost, this will help enable and empower husbands to “*love your wives, as Christ loved the church*” (Eph. 5:25 ESV) and wives to “*submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*” (Eph. 5:22 ESV). This will help them to enjoy the unity in their union that they were created for. This helps to guard them against gratifying their selfish temptations at the expense of their spouse. The redemption of marriage relationships facilitates reconciliation between spouses for the good benefit and improvement of godly families.

Lastly, how should Christians promote the LORD's grace found in His redemption of the human sexual relationship, in relation to the world outside of the Church?

This is a place the transforming power of the Gospel may be witnessed in the life of believers, making this an evangelistic opportunity for Christians.

When Jesus reconciled us to our Father in heaven, He also enabled us to be reconciled with one another. He enabled the restoration of our relationships by removing sin's yoke of bondage from them. The curse was lifted so that we are no longer bound and determined to sin and, through our regeneration, our nature has been changed so that we may desire to obey God's Law instead of sin.

Paul writes, “*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you.*”. The Apostle lists four {five, in the Greek} sexually-related sins which are used to describe or define sinners before listing five other, less severe and more broadly common sins. Paul declares that guilt for any such sin will disqualify a person from inheriting the kingdom of God. He declares that unrepentant sinners, such as thieves and drunkards or fornicators and homosexuals, have no hope of gaining Christ's kingdom.

But, the good news for everyone who repents of their sin and trusts in Jesus Christ as their source of justification; is that, by God's grace, they are no longer a thief, a drunk, a swindler, an idolater, adulterer, or even a homosexual. They are no longer what they once were, but have been transformed and are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:9-10)! Sin's hold over them is broken. Christians are remade to be different from both the world and the wretched, unrepentant sinner who they were before. Christians are given a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 11:19-20). They are a new person (Romans 6:6-7, Ephesians 4:20-24). They are no longer identified with their sin and they no longer identify themselves by their sin. Through earnest repentance and *pisteuo* faith, by the grace of Jesus Christ, they are no longer who or what they once were, regardless of what their past sins were. Covered by the blood of Jesus, they have been declared righteous by God and now, they are being made righteous by His Holy Spirit. When a person repents truly, then they are no longer what they once were. They have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are now the adopted sons and daughters of God (John 1:12; Romans 8:14).

That fact should fill every Christian with hope, for both themselves and their neighbors. It should be an encouragement because it reminds them that no one is too far away from God, if He chooses to call them to Himself. While life remains, there is always hope for the salvation of anyone, if the LORD wills it. This means that God can and will forgive a person for even the worst of sexual sins, when they are confessed and repented of.

- Someone who has watched pornography may be forgiven and restored.
- Someone who has taken advantage of their spouse sexually, being more concerned with gratifying their own selfish desires, may be forgiven and restored.

- Someone who has committed adultery may be forgiven and restored.
- Someone who has lived as and practiced homosexuality may be forgiven and restored.
- Even someone who has even undergone surgery, hormone therapy, sterilization, and lived under a false and deceptive identity, may be forgiven and restored.

But, they will only be forgiven if they have repented and have abandoned their sins in the past tense by mortifying them with the help of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:13). Someone who has repented of their sin and been restored to fellowship with the LORD, although they may still be tempted, will not be known or remembered for their past, but only by their present and future in Christ Jesus. They are no longer what or who they once were.

So, as Christians who hold onto this hope for ourselves, we should also hold onto it for our fellow believers.

Let us pray for their continued repentance against whatever sins once assailed them, just as we pray for ourselves.

Let us pray for the restoration of their relationships, just as we pray for our own to be restored, reconciled, and redeemed.

Let us pray that through our witness, by our example, and with our encouragement, people around us will come to trust Christ in faith, repent, and experience a transformed life of godliness as all their relationships begin to be reconciled and restored.

AMEN

Terms:

Covenant Theology – a systematic, biblical theology framework which understands and explains redemptive history through the lens of the covenants which the LORD God has made.

Covenant of Works – the first (in time) covenant instituted by the LORD, with Adam, on behalf of all humanity. This covenant promised the reward of continuing life upon the condition of perfect obedience to God's law [Genesis 2:15-17].

Covenant of Grace – the second (in time) covenant instituted by the LORD, on behalf of the Elect, for their salvation. Although there are multiple gracious covenants described within Scripture (such as the Noahic covenant [Genesis 9], the Abrahamic covenant [Genesis 15 and 17], and the David covenant [2 Samuel 7]), their specific promises are all encapsulated and included within the broader Covenant of Grace.

The Old Covenant – also known as the Sinaiatic Covenant; refers to the Mosaic administration of the Covenant of Grace which is contained within the Law, and which lends its title to describe the Hebrew Scriptures as the Old Testament (Greek: *diatheke*; covenant).

The New Covenant – refers to the Gospel administration of the Covenant of Grace which was first prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah [Jeremiah 31:31-34] and later proclaimed by Jesus Christ and His Apostles, and which lends its title to describe the Greek Scriptures as the New Testament. Through this covenant, Jesus has redeemed the Elect from the justice which their sin deserves by suffering it on their behalf [Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32], and Jesus has justified the Elect by the imputation of His perfectly righteous obedience to God's Law on their behalf [Galatians 2:16], and Jesus has sent God the Holy Spirit to apply this redemption and justification to the Elect [John 3:1-21], sanctifying them in holiness and adopting them as the children of God [John 1:12].

tselem - Hebrew noun meaning “image”; describes a type of physical representation.

demot – Hebrew noun meaning “likeness”; describes a kind of regular pattern, like a copy.

avad – Hebrew verb meaning “to work”; possesses a variety of senses, including: to work, to cultivate or to tend, to serve, and to worship.

shamar - Hebrew verb meaning “to keep”; possesses the senses of: to keep watch, to guard, and to protect.

ezer – Hebrew noun meaning “helper”; possessing the sense of supporter and one who works to aid the other.

exousia – Greek term meaning “authority” or “power”, generally referring to an inherent or imbued power of authority (Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*); commonly used throughout the New Testament (102 times, 93 verses).

authenteo – Greek term translated as “to have authority” or to “domineer [over someone]”; imbued with negative connotations as being abusive, domineering, or false (Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*; Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature* p. 120). The term is used only once in the New Testament and was otherwise rare or uncommonly used in contemporary literature.

Paradidomai - (3) as a legal technical term for passing someone along in the judicial process *hand over, turn over, deliver up* (MK 15.1); of an unjustified act of handing someone over to judicial authorities *betray* (MT 10.4); of God's judicial act of handing someone over to suffer the consequences of his wrongdoing *deliver up, hand over, give up (to)* (RO 1.24); of the church's authoritative disciplining *deliver over, hand over to the control of* (1C 5.5); (Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*)

Porneia - (1) generally, of every kind of extramarital, unlawful, or unnatural sexual intercourse *fornication, sexual immorality, prostitution* (1C 5.1); (2) when distinguished from adultery (μοιχεία) in the same context *extramarital intercourse, sexual immorality, fornication* (MT 15.19); (3) as a synonym for μοιχεία (*marital*) *unfaithfulness, adultery* (MT 5.32); (4) metaphorically, as apostasy from God through idolatry (*spiritual*) *immorality, unfaithfulness* (RV 19.2); (Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*)