

1 Corinthians 6:18/ 1 Samuel 3/ John 1
Discipleship: Chasing After & Chasing Away
January 14, 2018

Today's sermon took shape when one word captured my attention. That one word is *flee*, from 1 Corinthians 6:18, "*flee from sexual immorality.*" The root of that verb is literally *fugue*. In music a fugue is a form of composition where a melodic statement is made in one voice and then after a few measures it is repeated in another. The two melodies joyfully chase each other and weave together to make beautiful polyphonic (multi-voiced) music. Johann Sebastian Bach was a master of the fugal form. In a more negative sense, that Greek word is also the root of our English word *fugitive* - one who flees from the Law. Christians shouldn't flee from the Law of God. He has given it to us for our individual good and for the benefit of society as a whole. Rather, we flee from the temptations that lead us to break the Law. But today's Testament lesson and Gospel are about discipleship, so you ask, "*How is this connected?*" The answer is that discipleship (following Jesus) involves fleeing from or chasing away the sin in our lives as well as fleeing to or chasing after Jesus.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the one flesh union of a man and a woman is only to be conducted within the boundaries of marriage. When it occurs outside of that divinely established institution, it is sexual immorality, as St. Paul says. It doesn't matter if you really, really love one another, or if someday you do indeed plan to be married, or if you both consent to what you are doing, it is *porneia*, translated here as *sexual immorality*. It describes both thoughts as well as deeds; images as well as actions. Hebrews 13:4 also speaks directly to this issue, "*Let marriage be honored by all and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and the adulterous.*"

The sixth commandment says, "*Thou shall not commit adultery.*" This is not just a mandate to the marriage. Unmarried persons can violate this too. It goes back to keeping the marriage bed undefiled. Churches critical of the Bible have thrown that commandment out decades ago, and have conformed to the standards of the world. And churches like ours, who still believe it, are often regarded by the world with contempt. But let's be clear, God gave us the sixth commandment and all the others for our good. The Bible speaks often of sixth commandment issues, because its violation brings a whole host of problems for individuals, families, and society at large.

Moreover, when committed by God's people, sexual sins especially harm the Christian message, making the outside world regard all believers as hypocrites. Even non-Christian public figures and celebrities are being called into account these days. Believers should be too. In today's Old Testament message God declares that He is about to punish the house of Eli forever. Samuel will take the place of Eli and his wicked sons Hophni and Phineas. Read chapter 2 of 1 Samuel and you will see what these boys were doing. They were not fleeing from sexual immorality, but engaging in it. And the results were disastrous.

St. Paul reminds us in today's epistle that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. It is sacred, set apart, dedicated for the Lord's use. He makes that statement to explain why sexuality immorality is so serious. As such it is a word of warning, a message of Law. But it is also a comforting word of the Gospel. We have a special status in the eyes of God. We are bought with a price. And it was a high price. God wasn't shopping for a discount or a bargain. He wasn't cheap when it came to our redemption. He was willing to pay "top dollar" for our salvation, but it took something even more valuable, the sacrifice of His Son. You know the familiar words from 1 Peter 1:18, echoed in our Catechism, "*You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*"

God took the action to seek us out, to chase after us, to wash us clean with the blood of Christ, and rescue us from every sort of sin – sins against our body, as St. Paul has been talking about in our epistle, sins against Him, and sins against our neighbor. While some sins might seem bigger in the eyes of the world, bringing a higher degree of shame//; and while some sins have larger and longer-lasting consequences than others, all sins are equally forgiven by Christ. Jesus is the searching shepherd who seeks out His lost sheep no matter how far they have wandered. He says, "*My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me.*"

Young Samuel heard the voice of God calling him and replied, "*Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.*" Philip heard the voice of Jesus say, "*Follow me,*" and had such a strong faith that Jesus was indeed the One about whom Moses and the prophets wrote that he found Nathanael, inviting him to "*come and see*" the Lord. Present-day disciples do the same. As God's Law works to convict us of our sin, we flee **from** it in contrite penitence as we flee **to** Him who forgive us and makes us His own. Then we are empowered to witness to the world of His great, forgiving love.

Let's face it, Christians are not immune from sexual temptations. Satan works more diligently on us because if he succeeds the results are more consequential. Pray the Lord's Prayer with special emphasis on the 6th and 7th temptations, "*Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.*" God hears you. Perhaps in times past you struggled and fell in this regard. You regret your actions even now. Please be assured, you are forgiven. The past is not held against you. Your transgressions are forgiven and forgotten, thrown into the depths of the sea, never to be recovered.

While we certainly have different roles than did Samuel, Paul, Philip, or Nathanael, God calls each of us, like them, to hear His voice, heed His Word, and follow Him. He convicts us of our sin, so that we flee from it, chase it away, and sorrow over it; but then He comforts us with the Gospel, so that we flee to Him, rest in His forgiveness, and use the strength and faith He provides to glorify Him with our lives. We are the Temple of His Holy Spirit. What a joyous privilege and high calling that is. Amen.