

Sermon 17, Consensual Sin Is Still Sin, Matthew 5:19-32

Proverbs 1:10 My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.

Pro 16:29 A man of violence entices his neighbor, And leads him in a way that is not good.

Eph 5:11 And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them;

1 Timothy 5:22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

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Proposition: To either do or allow what God forbids is wicked, and Jesus says it must not be done.

When I mention “crooked cops,” what comes to mind? Do you think that the actions of crooked cops are justifiable? We know that this church is full of law enforcement types, including cops, an assistant DA, and a judge. But whether your daily work is in the field of law enforcement or not, I have little doubt that you look down on crooked cops. What is a crooked cop? Well, it’s a law enforcement officer who agrees to turn a blind eye to crime for the sake of his job, monetary kickbacks, or even his life. In other words, rather than take the risk of offending influential criminal elements, he aids and abets them, often for significant financial gain.

We intuitively recognize that just because the cops turn a blind eye, some crimes are still crimes. Just because the cops don’t mess with The Godfather doesn’t mean that his empire is all totally legal. You see, the problem with a crooked cop is that he consents to crime. He lets it happen, when his official job is to stop it.

Well, believe it or not, it's not just cops who can be crooked. You and I can be crooked Christians, turning a blind eye, even aiding and abetting sins. And the fact of the matter is that when we do that, we are just as bad as crooked cops.

Today we continue to look at the Sermon on the Mount, but we are zooming out to look at a larger chunk all at once. You see, Jesus is in the middle of explaining what the righteousness of God's Kingdom requires. He specifically touches on murder, lust, and divorce. All three of these sins had been redefined in Jesus' day, generally by manipulating the letter of the law. Thus, as we saw over the last two weeks, the Rabbis had made murder a matter of actions alone, but said that hate speech and heartfelt hatred weren't really wrong. They had made adultery a technicality — leave married people alone, but everything else is okay! As we will see next week, they had made divorce a matter of filing the right paperwork. Well, what do all three of these sins have in common? They are mutual sins. They are sins that require two people. You can't get a divorce all by yourself. You can't murder when there's no one to murder. You can't commit adultery with someone who doesn't exist.

It's in light of this idea that these are usually communal sins that I want to address a different perversion of the law, one that is more common in our day. This perversion teaches that sins that require two people can be legitimized by nothing more than mutual consent. In other words, rape is bad, but whatever consenting adults do is okay. Murder is bad, but euthanasia is okay. The element of consent, on this view, is the element that makes or breaks the moral quality of an action. As long as you have the other person's consent, you can do whatever you want to him. This view has made crooked Christians out of many better people than we are.

Well, Jesus addressed that idea by implication as He talked about these three kinds of sins. What He said was very clear: To either do or to allow what God forbids is sinful. It's wrong. It's wicked. It must never be done. As we begin, please remember that this teaching is addressed to the disciples. It's not Jesus' way of condemning outsiders. It's not His secretive method of saying, "We're cool in here, in our little Christian club, but those wicked people out there — well, let me tell you what scumbags they are." Not at all! This teaching is addressed to disciples, to those who have no condemnation already in Christ. The point is not that you should think, "Wow, Christians are hateful," but "Wow, Christians hold themselves to a high standard." Or, better, "Wow! Jesus holds Christians to a high standard." In the Kingdom of Heaven, crooked Christians are the lowest on the totem pole. That's what Jesus says. We see that even here in the first point:

I. Introduction: The Law Binds You, vv. 19-20

Once again, let us look briefly at Jesus' words to His disciples. He says that if you break the tiniest law and tell other people that it's right to break it, your status in the Kingdom will be very low. Remember, here, that the "the Kingdom of Heaven" and Heaven itself are not the same thing. The Kingdom is God's rule and reign. Your status as a subject of God will be lower if you break the law or endorse lawbreaking. But in fact, you can't even become a subject of the Kingdom without a perfect righteous, one that is both qualitatively and quantitatively better than

the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Remember, the scribes and Pharisees were externally very good people. They were known as strict conservatives and admired by the common people because they taught the law and kept the law. But Jesus said that the way they taught and kept the law was not good enough to even become a subject of God's kingdom. If you're no better than a Pharisee, you can't even get into the Kingdom!

In other words, the law binds you. The law asserts a moral obligation, and it holds you to that obligation.

What does it mean to be bound? It means to be held. It means to be tied. A binding law is one that forces you to do what it says. Thus, for instance, a restraining order is a binding legal instrument that prevents you from seeing or talking to a particular person. If you try to violate the restraining order, then the cops will come and take you to jail. Well, Jesus reminds us by His words about keeping and breaking the commandments that all of His commandments are binding. Everything He says has a penalty attached, as we will see in a moment.

So that's how this Sermon on the Mount moves: after describing Christians, Jesus explains what they have to do, what they have to be like. These aren't suggestions; they are authoritative commands.

II. The Law: Murder, Adultery, and No-Fault Divorce Are Sins, vv. 19-32

Here in the section we're looking at today, Jesus specifically discusses three particular sins. He says each of these sins is wrong, and He specifically mentions Hell as the punishment for two of them, and further sin as the punishment for the third. Now, you don't go to Hell because you did something right. You don't get given over to sin because you did something right. No; Hell is the punishment for a sin. Further sin is also, often, the punishment for sin.

A. Human Permission Never Overrides Divine Prohibition!

Now, here's the key point I want to insist on as we briefly survey all three of these sins. Human permission doesn't override divine prohibition.

1. Euthanasia and Suicide Are Still Murder

Jesus unequivocally says that murder is wrong, and He adds that anything on the murder spectrum, including hatred and harsh language, is also wrong.

Now, think with me for a minute about euthanasia. What's the key idea here? Well, the word is a coinage made by putting together two Greek words, "good" and "death." The point of euthanasia is that you can have a good death. You can go to the doctor and say, "Doc, I'm in pain and I want to die," and he will give you a lethal injection and you'll just slip away and it will all be wonderful. Hollywood has glorified this idea in a recent film, and euthanasia is legal in some states and several European countries.

What's the key element here, allegedly? Well, for patients who are well enough to make their own decisions, the idea is that they consent. For those who are not as well, the idea is that they would consent if they were functionally able to do so. The bottom-line idea is that it must be okay because the person wants to do it, or at least that he should want to do it. In other words,

euthanasia is predicated on the idea that a human being has the right to choose when he will die. It's based on the thought that you needn't live any longer than you want to.

Now, one clue to the problems with this moral account of euthanasia is that it legitimizes suicide. If euthanasia is morally permissible, then so is suicide. After all, the two are virtually interchangeable. They are both ways of killing yourself; one just involves the medical establishment, and the other doesn't.

Now, do you believe that suicide is wrong? If so, why? Just because it hurts those left behind? Just because it is the ultimate act of selfishness? Just because it is a permanent solution to a temporary problem? Just because it is a denial of life itself? Suicide is wrong for all those reasons, of course. But ultimately, it is wrong because God has created us and rules over us, and He says that we are not allowed to choose the time of our own death. At least, He says that murder is wrong.

But included in that command against murder, as you can see from Jesus' words here, is a command against hatred. It says that anger is wrong, and that harsh language is wrong. These are the actions of hatred, scorn, and contempt.

Even wanting to hurt someone with words is a sin. How much more, then, wanting to hurt him physically! If thinking harshly and calling names is a sin, then how much more actually acting out your wicked thoughts!

But euthanasia hurts someone. In fact, it kills someone. Murder is wrong. Hatred is wrong. Name-calling is wrong. And consent on the part of the victim can't change that fact. Notice that Jesus doesn't say, "If you call your brother a fool you're in danger of hellfire, unless he's okay with it." In other words, the moral quality of the action is the same whether the victim consents or not. Suicide is impossible without self-hatred, and self-hatred is a sin.

2. Giving Yourself Sexually, Apart from Marriage, Is Always Wrong

Notice the next section, where Jesus condemns lust. He doesn't say that lust is wrong unless the woman has consented to be the target of lust. He doesn't say that adultery is okay if it's between consenting adults. The idea of consent is not relevant to Christian sexual morality. Lusting after your girlfriend is wrong. How much more, then, is sleeping with her!

You see, once again the idea is that consent doesn't change the moral quality of the action. Lust is lust is lust, and it will send you straight into a place of long-term suffering and pain. That's why Christians have insisted that pornographic images are not acceptable, even if done with the full consent of the actors. That's why Christians have insisted that living together without marriage is wrong, even if both partners are okay with it. Jesus isn't okay with it. As we read in Gen. 2 this morning, you have the right to consent to marriage or to withhold consent to marriage. Marriage is within your free choice, one way or the other. But giving yourself sexually apart from marriage violates the explicit words of Jesus right here.

3. Divorce for Inadequate Grounds Is Sinful

Same thing goes for divorce. Divorce is not about what you and your spouse decide makes sense for both of you, whether separately or together. Jesus says that only sexual immorality is

adequate grounds for divorce, and that anything less brings about adultery. As we'll see next week, sin can be punished with pain or with more sin. In the case of divorce, the punishment is more sin.

B. Permitting What God Forbids Is Always Wrong, v. 19

Well, in terms of these three things — murder, adultery, and divorce — the implications of Jesus' words are clear. Even if someone consents to you sinning against him, you are still sinning against that person. Teaching other people that it's okay to break God's law is a problem. In fact, it's always wrong. It's a reason for demotion of kingdom status, as we talked about a few weeks ago. Sinning like this doesn't mean *ipso facto* that you're not a Christian — but it does mean that you're not a very good Christian. Okaying sins that God forbids is simply unacceptable for the believer or for any human being.

III. The Reason for the Law, 1 Cor. 6:12-20

Now, why is it wrong to permit what God forbids? What's the big deal? Why doesn't God allow us to do what we want to do? "It's my body," right? "I can do with what I want." Well, actually, Paul addressed that same idea. Some Christians in Greece had this same idea. They actually thought that anything they wanted to do was acceptable. Their slogan was "all things are lawful." Let's read what they had to say, and what Paul had to say to them.

A. We Are Creatures and Thus Dependent

Now, there's a lot in this passage. I realize that Paul is making application specifically to sexual sin. However, his point applies to murder, suicide, and euthanasia as well. The body is not for sexual immorality. It is not for whatever you want it to be for. It has a certain purpose. It is, in fact, for the Lord. This is referring back to creation. You don't get to choose what you're here for. You're here for God. That means that you have to do what God says. You aren't the final arbiter over your own body; God is. He's the one who tells you what you're here for. Just look at how Jesus spoke: "I say to you." In other words, on my authority I inform you that lusting will send you to Hell.

B. We Are Subjects and Thus Not Autonomous

But Paul goes on to make a second point to these Greek Christians. You belong to God. You are subject to Him. You are not "autonomous," which is a fancy Greek way of saying "You are not a law unto yourself." Thus, sexual immorality cannot be justified by appealing to mutual consent. God's law is in fact concerned with what consenting adults do in the privacy of their own bedroom. God's law is in fact concerned with what consenting adults do in a hospital room, or in a divorce court. Murder, lust, divorce — all of these things are wrong and sinful, and consent can't make them okay. Lack of consent didn't make the action a sin, and getting consent doesn't make it right.

IV. The Fulfillment of the Law

Now, maybe you've gone too far sexually with your girlfriend or boyfriend. Maybe you've been tempted by/attempted suicide, or agreed with your spouse that divorce would be the best solution.

What do you do now? You know you've broken the law. You knew that before we started here, but reading it in black and white and hearing me say it is designed to help you understand that you have definitely broken the law. Further, you know that the fact that someone consented to being sinned against doesn't make it right. What do you do now? How do you get right with God again? How do you get the law off your back?

Well, whether you're a believer or not today, you need to recognize two things.

A. By Jesus

First, Jesus kept the law perfectly. He didn't commit suicide. He never lusted. He never assisted with euthanasia. He never got a divorce. He never went too far with His girlfriend. In fact, He did absolutely everything that the law commands. He kept God's law perfectly. Everything that He tells us to do in the Sermon on the Mount, He did first. And He suffered the consequences for other people's sins. You know what? Those wicked Greek Christians deserved to die. So did the apostle Paul who was writing to them. But instead of killing them, Jesus died for them. He died so they wouldn't have to.

And you know what? His death is still available. If you want His death to be in place of yours, just ask. Go in prayer to the one who perfectly fulfilled the law and say, "Jesus, please save me. Please forgive me. Please apply the benefits of your death to me so that I won't have to die and go suffer forever." If you know that He's already saved you, then you know that you aren't condemned. You, then, have all the more reason to go back to Him and plead for His forgiveness. He will restore you to fellowship. He will give you inner assurance that you are forgiven, that you are His child.

B. By You

And if you are His child, then you have the ability to do the right thing. You have the power to no longer sin against God. You don't have to look for ways to salve your conscience, things like, "Well, my girlfriend was okay with it so it can't have been too bad." "Well, he wanted to die so it couldn't have been that wicked to kill him." "All things are lawful." All of these poverty-stricken excuses will wither and die when you call out to Jesus for help. He will forgive you for your past sins, and He will send you His Spirit, who will help you to keep His commandments.

Does the law condemn you? Did the law this morning expose some way in which you have sought to deny your status as a creature and claim that you have the authority to nullify the law of God? If so, what are you going to do about that? Are you going to just refuse to think about it? Are you going to persist in that sin, willfully ignoring the consequences? Or are you going to ask Jesus for forgiveness and for strength to obey? He died so that everyone who believes in Him could live. He was known during His time on earth as the friend of sinners.

If you're justified, then claim the promise that there is no condemnation in Christ. That doesn't mean that your sins are now good things, things to be proud of. Rather, it means that you can confidently go to Jesus and ask for forgiveness. You can be reconciled to Him, as we talked about two weeks ago. You can repent, turn around, and go back to Him, as we talked about last week, knowing that He won't condemn you but rather forgive you. You can't forgive what

wasn't wrong. No one has to forgive the President for living in the White House. But Jesus forgives sins.

Jesus gave this sermon to His disciples. He told them that they had no right to overrule His commands, or to call "right" what He called "wrong." But at the same time, He was known to the people everyone looked down on. He didn't believe in euthanizing undesirable elements, or in telling women that should just accept whatever a man wanted to do to them. He clearly commands men to stop looking with lust and divorcing their wives for any and every reason. He said all the things He said because He was perfect, because He was the Son of God. Then He died, because He knew that was the only way to give life to wicked people like me and you.

Will you ask Him for help this morning? Will you call on Him? Will you seek the strength to stop believing that mutual consent makes evil good, and start trying to follow the way of the Kingdom instead? Your life depends on it. Amen.