

REVELATION 22:12-20 ENTER THE HOLY CITY

There's too much in this passage for one discussion, and so what I'll focus on, or start with and expand upon is verse fifteen. There we're told that outside of the gates of the Holy City, meaning in hell, outside of heaven, "are the sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

If we go back to Revelation 21:8 we would read, "as for the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death".

There's even too much in these two verses to focus on at one time, and so for today we'll narrow down our focus to the sexually immoral and the sixth commandment. You shall not commit adultery. So firstly, we have to ask what is sexual immorality, and what can we address as a church and as Christians.

To gain a clear understanding for ourselves I turn to 1 Corinthians 5:9-11. There Paul writes, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality".

Here, and in other places the Bible is clearly telling us not to focus on the sins of the world. We cannot avoid the sins of the world. They're in our face almost endlessly, and especially this month, and yet too many churches make it their mission to yell at the world about their sinful behaviour. I ask you, why would a non-Christian care about something that you tell them is a sin. To them it's not a sin, because they're not a Christian. Paul is telling us to focus on our own house, our own church first. When we talk about sexual immorality we have to look within, before we can even think about looking without.

So, what is sexual immorality from a Biblical perspective? In Matthew 5:27-28 Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." So, Jesus says that looking and intently thinking impure thoughts is sexual immorality.

Throughout the Bible there are a multitude of examples of sexually immoral behaviours which I don't have time to list now, and to do so can get quite vulgar (Romans 1:26-27).

The point of today's text is not to list all those different types of sexual immorality, but rather to just state bluntly that those who partake in such acts without repentance won't be going to heaven. And if you want confirmation of that you can read the same thing that our text says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21, and in other places.

All I'm trying to establish is that this teaching about sexual immorality is found throughout the Bible precisely because of how our text ends. There we're warned against adding to our Holy Scriptures, and against taking away from our Holy Scriptures, because if we do that then we'll lose our place in Heaven. That's why I began with Paul telling us not to focus on the sinful practices of people outside of the church, but rather to be concerned with what's going on inside of the church. If we let what's going on outside of the church into the church, which some denominations have done, then God says that He'll take away our share in the tree of life and in the Holy City.

Many Christians don't like to hear this as they want to embrace the ways of the world so that the world feels welcome in the church, but then this is no longer the Christian Church, but it's a worldly organization. So, I'll give you a few more passages from the Bible to make this point clear. In Deuteronomy Moses said, "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you" (4:2). "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it" (12:32). Proverbs 30:6 clearly says, "Do not add to God's words, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar".

Back in the New Testament again Paul wrote, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9).

That's what it all comes down to, if you live contrary to God's Word or change God's Word so that you feel comfortable living contrary to God's Word, then you're accursed, you'll face the recompense of Jesus, and you won't be going to heaven, but rather to hell.

Yet, our text doesn't leave us with such a dismal message, but in fact right before our text Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (v. 7). Then in our text Jesus says, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates" (v. 14). This is the Gospel of our text.

The law was telling us to not change God's Word or follow those who change and live opposed to God's Word, because only hell awaits them. They remain outside the gates of heaven. In other places Jesus describes Himself as the door and those who try to climb in by other ways as thieves, robbers and wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:13-15; John 10:1-10).

The Gospel tells us that if we live according to God's Word, and wash our robes, we'll be going to heaven. However, for many Christians the imagery of washing robes has been lost. What does that mean to you? I'll give you a few passages that explain this, because this is all Gospel.

Romans 13:14 tells us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." We all have old sinful robes, as all that Law we heard makes clear, yet if you wear a washed robe it's not just trying to scrub the sin off of ourselves, but rather it's putting on the new clean robe of Jesus. Back in the book of Revelation it's stated this way – "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14).

Our robes are tainted with all sorts of sins from sexual immorality to lying, as our text makes clear, but a robe washed in the blood of Jesus removes that sin. Peter puts it this way – "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" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

How is it that blood can make us clean from sin? Well, it's Jesus' blood – the sinless Son of God – and He was sacrificed to pay for our sins. Back in the book of Leviticus when the sacrificial system was being set up for the sole purpose of pointing to what Jesus would do for us, God told the people that "the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life" (17:11).

Later Isaiah would say, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks Himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (61:10).

It all goes together, all of these various passages from the Bible, and if you remove one, like a house of cards your hope of salvation falls. However, if everything is held in place, then you have more than a house of cards, you have a home in Heaven, in the Holy City of God, thanks to the Lamb of God who has washed you clean from all of your sins by His life-giving blood. Amen.