

“Living in Sin”

The phrase “living in sin” once had a very specific meaning- for some, it still does. It was used to refer to a couple “living together” without being properly married. But as “sleeping together” fails to precisely identify the problem (because “sleeping” is not it), so too “living together” is not really the issue- though both situations usually lead to the actual “sin” involved. The *sin* of “living in sin” or “living together” is sexual immorality.

In 1Thessalonians 4:3, the Holy Spirit reveals God’s will for our lives- and it isn’t that we “Live long and prosper” (sorry Trekkies), or even that we are “happy, contented, and free” here. Instead, it is “*sanctification*,” which, at least in this passage and context, is defined as “*abstain(ing) from sexual immorality*.” *Sexual immorality* is a broad term that encompasses all *sexual sins*. Since “sin” is literally a *missing of the mark* (see 1John 3:4 where the Greek word translated as “*sin*” is *hamartia*; defined as *missing the mark*), what is God’s *mark* for our *sexual activity*? Passages such as Matthew 19:4-6 and 1Corinthians 7:1-4 make it clear that sex is to be reserved for, and can only be lawfully expressed in and through, the proper *marriage* of a *man* and a *woman*. **Anything** else *misses the mark* of God’s will for us in “*sanctification*.”

It is interesting that four of the first five sins listed in 1Corinthians 6:9-10 as preventing one from “*the kingdom of God*” are *sexual* in nature. And at the time of writing, even *idolatry* often included the use of both male and female *temple prostitutes* in “worship.” This doesn’t make *sexual sins* any worse than “other sins” since the additional listing of *thievery*, *covetousness*, *drunkenness*, *reviling*, and *swindling* in v.10 will also prevent one from “*the kingdom of God*.” It does, however, likely indicate that these *sexual sins* were a prevalent problem in Corinth at the time. They are also here and now for us. But let’s be clear in our understanding of some terms used in the passage before we go further: *fornication* is sex between the unmarried; *adultery* is sex between a married person and someone other than their spouse; and, *effeminate* and *homosexual* refer to both sides of same-gender sexual relations. So...

If your “dating” includes sex, or if your “living/sleeping together” includes sex, it is actually the sin of *fornication*. If your marriage includes past or present “affairs,” it is actually the sin of *adultery*. If your “same-gender partner” relationship includes sex, it is actually the sin of *homosexuality*.

There is, however, another important point I’d like us to consider. While the phrase “living in sin” may imply “sexual sin” to some of us older folks, such is surely not its only application. Please note 1John 3:7-10 in this regard, “*Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; any one who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.*” Any one who **practices** (continually repeats) **sin** (without specification- so, any sin) is, therefore, “living in sin”!

The *good news* of the gospel is that it doesn’t have to be this way. We have a choice. We don’t *have to* continue “living in sin” of any sort. Go back with me to 1Corinthians 6, but this time note the verse immediately following those that listed the sins preventing entrance to or staying in “*the kingdom of God*,” v.11, “*And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.*” Some of the Corinthians had been guilty of “living in” the sins that were enumerated in vv.9-10. But, through being **washed** (baptized, cf. Acts 22:16) and **sanctified** (repurposed for God’s use, cf. 1Thessalonians 4:1-7), they were **justified** (declared *righteous* by God). This doesn’t mean that the sins in which they were “living” became non-sinful, it means that they stopped “living in” them! They stopped “living in” the sins of *fornication*, *adultery*, *homosexuality*, *thievery*, *covetousness*, *drunkenness*, *revelry*, and *swindling*. And so can we. We don’t *have to*, and based on what we learned from 1John 3:7-10, *cannot* continue “living in sin” and presume to be a part of God’s kingdom.

“Living in sin”- whether involving *sexual* or *any other type* of sin, is a choice we make. But we have been given the opportunity to *choose* to live differently. If we submit and commit ourselves to God’s will and purpose for our lives, “living in/for Jesus” replaces “living in sin.” Are you “living in sin”? If so, will you continue to choose to do so, or decide to “live in/for Jesus” instead? (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)