



The Case for Virtue

Lesson Subject: Despite changes in society's standards, God's demand for sexual purity endures through all generations.

L18. Date: April 1984. **Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Corinthians 7:2-9.

Topic: Sexuality: Purity Commanded; Sanctification.

God made humans with bodies designed as they are. *"God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"* (Genesis 1:27); He ordained marriage, blessing their physical union and approving the begetting and rearing of children. *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh"* (Genesis 2:24). Sexual expression of love in marriage is pure and honorable.

The devil works to pervert the good thing God has ordained. He has attempted to make sexual relations a dirty, vulgar, and sinful thing. He has sought to change it into a curse instead of a blessing. He tries to pervert it by leading people to take it out of the place God ordained (the marriage bed) and change the purpose God ordained (instead of expressions of true love, a satisfaction of unbridled lust).

God's purpose in placing the sexual capacity in man and woman has not changed. He demands sexual purity the way He designed in the beginning. All people in all ages are accountable to Him in that area.

This lesson sets forth the case for moral virtue. Its central truth is, "Despite changes in society's standards, God's demand for sexual purity endures through all generations."

I GOD REQUIRES SEXUAL MORALITY (I Thessalonians 4:3)

A. God's will is for our personal sanctification: *"This is the will of God, even your sanctification"* (verse 3). That is His will for each of us, young and old, in whatever generation we live. The "Puritan ethic" of moral

virtue did not belong to the Puritans alone. Each one is obligated to live by God's standards or answer in judgment.

Holiness is the will of God for each of us. Paul desired of his converts, *"The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (I Thessalonians 5:23). That means every part of our being is to be sanctified unto our Lord. It is our business to *"cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* (II Corinthians 7:1). For without holiness no man shall see God (Hebrews 13:12).

B. God takes special concern about moral purity: *"that ye should abstain from fornication"* (I Thessalonians 4:3).

One of the four requirements set on Christian converts by a council of apostles and faithful brethren in Jerusalem was *"that ye abstain . . . from fornication: for which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well"* (Acts 15:29). God warns, *"Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"* (I Peter 2:11). The society of New Testament times was as sex-saturated as our own. God makes it quite clear in Holy Scripture that He demands moral purity.

II. A PERSON HAS CONTROL OVER HIS BODY (I Thessalonians 4:4-6)

A. He must master bodily desires for purposes of holiness. *"To possess his vessel in sanctification and honour"* means to master one's body purely and honorably, Paul set an example for us: *"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"* (I Corinthians 9:27).

"Sanctification and Honour" is the goal of self-control. It describes a life-style that is acceptable to God (sanctification) and respected before others (honor). Those who live that life-style will receive *"glory, honour, and peace"* (Romans 2:10).

B. He must keep free from the control of lust, particularly *"the lust of concupiscence"* (verse 5). That is the strong, almost overpowering desire for sexual expression. Paul's advice to young Timothy was, *"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart"* (II Timothy 2:22). The unregenerate flesh nature in each of us yearns passionately to dominate us and produce the works of the flesh in us (Galatians 5:16-25). Only control by the Holy Spirit can deliver us.

C. He must deal honorably with others in moral areas, being careful not to *"defraud his brother in any matter"* (verse 6). David was

guilty of “defrauding” Uriah when he took Uriah’s wife in an adulterous affair (II Samuel 12:1-14). “*The Lord is the avenger of all such*” (verse 6). The immoral person will account to God for his transgressions.

III. DIVINE PRINCIPLES JUDGE SEXUAL MORALITY (I Thessalonians 4:7, 8)

A. God requires us to turn from immorality to the holiest of lifestyles (verse 7). “*It is good for a man not to touch a woman*” (I Corinthians 7:1) outside the relationship God has ordained. “*Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy*” (I Peter 1:16). He never designed for the sexual union to be outside of marriage; it is solely for the expression of true commitment in love. “*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*” (Hebrews 13:4).

B. To reject the principles of morality is to reject God. “*He therefore that despiseth* (these requirements for sexual morality) *despiseth not man* (or, man-made rules), *but God*” (verse 8). To reject Bible teaching on these matters is not to reject society but to reject God. Jesus said, “*He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*” (John 12:48). It is wise to live by the word of God since we will be judged by its principles. Rejection of the Bible is rejection of God.

IV. MARRIAGE CONTRIBUTES TO SEXUAL MORALITY (I Corinthians 7:2-9)

A. Marriage helps “to avoid fornication” (verse 2). However, do not look upon marriage as “a barbed-wire fence to keep passions under control.” It is a holy relationship between a man and a woman which was ordained and blessed of God. It is divine purpose that “*the younger woman marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion for the adversary to speak reproachfully*” (I Timothy 5:14). The married state is no less holy than the unmarried. It is ordained of God to give proper expression for the sexual desire. With the sexual needs satisfied properly, there is no need for illicit relations.

B. Marriage involves one partner for life. The text speaks in the singular that every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband (verse 2). It is only when one is dead that the other is free to engage

another marriage (Romans 7:1-3). “*Husband of one wife*” is a right requirement for the man who would serve God (I Timothy 3:2, 12). Separation should not occur once the marriage is consummated (I Corinthians 7:10, 11).

C. Marriage is honorable for all people since “every man . . . every woman” is permitted to marry (verse 2). Marriage is honorable for all people in all its aspects as long as moral virtue marks the union (Hebrews 13:4).

D. Marriage is right and honorable because it is ordained of God (Genesis 2:18-24). “*What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*” (Mark 10:9) applies to every marriage, whether the partners are Christian or non-Christian.

V. HUSBAND AND WIFE HAVE A SEXUAL RESPONSIBILITY (I Corinthians 7:3, 4)

A. Each must be willing to minister sexually to the other (verse 3). To “*render . . . due benevolence*” means “to give conjugal rights” to one’s partner. The wife owes that to her husband and the husband owes that to his wife. To fail to minister to one another in such a way is to disobey God; it becomes a sin against Him as well as against one’s marriage partner.

B. Neither has the right to withhold self from the other (verse 4). The wife does not have the right to do as she pleases with her own body; the husband has a right to it. The husband cannot claim his body as his own; it belongs to his wife. Each must be thoughtful of the other.

But there is more to sex in marriage than the body. Giving the body is intended to be an expression of giving self each to the other in holy human affection.

Immorality cannot be excused because one lives with an uncooperative partner. But much adultery has resulted from that very problem.

VI. DIVINE PRINCIPLES GUIDE ABSTINENCE FROM SEXUAL EXPRESSION IN MARRIAGE (I Corinthians 7:5)

Read I Corinthians 7:5. It sets forth five truths that a husband and wife must live by. It is a key to happiness in marriage union.

A. Personal preference is no basis to refrain from sexual relations with one's marriage partner. "*Defraud ye not one the other*" means "stop refusing each other."

B. Mutual consent is necessary to refrain from sexual relations: "*except it be with consent for a time.*" Each should be thoughtful about the demands made on the other.

C. Religious purposes are the only reason to refrain from sexual relations for any extended period: "*that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer.*"

D. A return to normal sexual relations is to follow the period of restraint for religious reasons: "*for a time . . . and come together again.*"

E. The possibility of temptation to moral transgression is to be guarded against during the time of abstinence: "*that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency* (lack of self control)."

VII. BOTH THE MARRIED AND UNMARRIED STATES ARE HOLY BEFORE GOD (I Corinthians 7:6-9)

A. God does not command all people to marry (verse 6). He permits it in those who wish, but does not command it of all. Many single persons (like the apostle Paul) are fully in His will remaining in their unmarried state. Whether you are married or single, you can live for God.

B. God enables some to live content in life without a marriage partner (verses 7, 8). Some are that way by nature, some are made that way by human means, and some are willing to live that way because of their devotion and service in the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:12).

C. Marriage is the God-ordained way to satisfy human sexuality in an honorable way. Those who have strong passions may marry without offending the will of God at all (verse 9).

Marriage is a sacred relationship. It is closer and more binding than the parent-child relationship. That is why a man will "*leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24). It is such a sacred relationship that God used it to describe the relation of Christ to His church (Ephesians 5:21-33)!

QUESTIONS

1. Define adultery and fornication.

2. Why does God require sexual purity?
3. What does I Peter 2:11 contribute to this discussion?
4. How can one control the passion of his body?
5. How can one keep free from sexual lust?
6. What does Hebrews 13:4 mean to you?
7. How does marriage help maintain sexual purity?
8. What does I Corinthians 7:3, 4 mean to you?
9. What are the five principles of I Corinthians 7:5?
10. Why are both the married and unmarried states holy before God?