

SEXUAL PURITY

We really live in a confused and confusing world! We have so many conflicting messages coming at us that it is difficult to know what to think or believe. This is especially true for people who do not have exposure to regular and direct Biblical teaching on life itself. Have you been to the movies lately or watched any television? Read any of the popular fictional books or magazines? It seems that we are a society that is submerged in the seamier side of life. Christians are not isolated nor insulated from such influence. Even in the business world, it is difficult to carry on a conversation without sexual connotations creeping into the conversation. Business relationships with other companies are referred to in terms of dating, dancing, opening the kimono, going to bed, etc. We see and hear all of this and we should wonder, "What is happening to Christian America?" It almost seems as if the greatest Christian nation on earth is trying to outdo the pagan world in depravity. I think that this is evidence that we have and are continuing to drift (maybe run) away from God and have slipped into a secular society where righteousness and sexual purity is of questionable value. Living in such surroundings can have significant influence on Christians.

We all have a need for food and get a great deal of satisfaction from eating, however, unless we control that appetite in a disciplined fashion, we may wind up weighing 500 pounds. In a similar way, we need to recognize that we are sexual beings and that part of our nature should be given proper attention to meet the needs in a controlled and disciplined way. What works best, and we believe is in line with God's will for meeting these needs, is a monogamous marriage relationship. This is what the Bible teaches. In one of the discussions that Jesus had with the religious leaders of His day, the subject of divorce came up. The Pharisees were trying to get Him to say something that conflicted with the law of Moses. The answer that Jesus gave addressed what God had intended as a framework for sexual expression.

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." Matthew 19:4-6

God's plan since the Creation (at the beginning) was that our sexuality should find its expression in a male-female relationship of a husband and wife. The implication here is that God has not sanctioned sexual expression that is not male-female AND He has not sanctioned even this expression outside of marriage. The importance of the marriage relationship can be seen in its comparison to the parent-child relationship. It is difficult for us to imagine a stronger, more caring, un-conditional love and acceptance relationship than that of a parent-child relationship. However, Jesus said that the marriage relationship takes priority over even the parent-to-child relationship.

The expression "what God hath joined together" may be speaking of the intent and type of relationship and strength of unity in the relationship. God's design for us was the male-female sexuality, He intended for that relationship to take priority over all others, and He intended for it to be unifying in that we are to build on each other's strengths and make up for each other's weaknesses.

The result of the proper expression of our sexuality has a very practical overcome: it produces more people and places them in an environment where they can grow and be properly nourished. This is in line with God's plan that we populate the earth. Improper expression of a our

sexuality can also result in producing people (babies); however, this can also produce a problem of how to care for these babies that are not brought into a family setting - that are not born to a husband and wife. The world's way of dealing with this problem is to eliminate the baby before it is born. We are all familiar with what has been called the American Holocaust where our society has sacrificed over 30 million unborn children to the god of "irresponsible free-dom". We recoil in horror at the story of how Pharaoh ordered the killing of children in Egypt, of the people of Canaan practicing child sacrifice to the pagan god Molech and how Herod the Great ordered the killing of the children in Bethlehem and yet we passively yawn at the news of 30 million deaths since 1973 just because it was done in a doctor's office and was perpetrated against an unborn child. Obviously, we are not adequately seeing the seriousness of the problem.

This is not the first time in the history of the church that sexual immorality has been a problem for Christians. The church at Corinth faced problems of this nature that grew out of the fact that these Christians came out of a society that had a much different value system and they were still learning and growing in the process of being transformed into the image of Christ. Also, they continued to be influenced by the philosophies of the society in which they lived. Paul saw the need to strongly speak out against the immoral philosophy of the world in an effort to strengthen these Christians in their commitment to purity in their lives. It is the responsibility of the church today to strongly countermand the world's message. If it is not done, then the temptations of the world will overtake and trap even Christians.

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"--but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 1 Corinthians 6:13, 18-20

We tend to have adages or sayings that express our ideas and philosophy of life. These are not always good philosophies. Some examples that we have are "You owe it to yourself to have the very best," "You've got to look out for No. 1," "Don't get mad, get even." "I did it my way," "It is only wrong, if you get caught." One of the expressions in the Greek society around Corinth was "Meat for the belly and the belly for meat." The idea expressed by this adage was that the physical life was completely separate from and had no influence on the spiritual and emotional life. There are people who believe this error even today. An associate with whom I worked once told me that a person should not let his "religion" interfere with his sex life. That was said in response to a comment that I made about my not laughing at a crude joke. I was asked, "Didn't you get it?" to which I replied, "I got it, I just didn't appreciate it."

Paul offered to them a new slogan that was appropriate for the Christian to replace the old adage: "The body is for the Lord and the Lord is for the body." The importance of the body to the spiritual life was emphasized by Paul in his pointing out that the body is going to be resurrected before the Judgment Day. In failing to see an interconnectedness and relationship between the body, the soul and the spirit, people did not guard their behavior closely enough. If sin is strictly a matter of the inner nature, then "what I do with my body doesn't matter" would be the erroneous conclusion of such a lack of insight. The spiritual implication of sexual misconduct was of particular concern to Paul since the sexual act causes the "two to become one" and sexual union with a defiled person defiles the body of the Christian that participated. That is bad enough just from the physical considerations and the possibility of contracting some bad (even deadly) disease, but it is even worse

when we consider that in the Christian relationship our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. So the conclusion that Paul leaves us with is that we have defiled God's Temple. This analogy gives us a sense of the magnitude and seriousness of such behavior in the eyes of God. (Defiling a temple was punishable by death.) Much of the misconduct stems from a failure to continually realize that we belong to God. When we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we became part of the family of God and, consequently, we do NOT belong to ourselves.

So, how do we avoid the problems of the influence of our past life before Christ and that of living the Christian life in a worldly world? Paul gives us some advice along these lines in his letter to the church at Rome.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:1-2

The message of this passage makes it clear that we have responsibility to cooperate with God in our Christian growth. We have been saved by the mercy of God and it is by God's mercy that we continue in his salvation. But notice that Paul pleaded with these early Christians to give their physical selves as a sacrifice to God. This is a different kind of sacrifice in that most sacrifices were slaughtered or killed, but our sacrifice is to be alive. The sacrifice is involved in giving up our own natural desires and will to be a part of the world system by setting ourselves apart for God's service.

The means of accomplishing this is to first realize that all our actions begin in our heart and mind. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

If our mind has been trained and programmed with the philosophies of the world, then we will interpret life in that light and our behavior will be in accordance with the way we think. The real solution of changing behavior is to change the way we think and that requires a re-programming of the mind with Kingdom principles. Until we do this we will not fully experience the benefits of our salvation in this life here on earth.

It is important for us as Church people to work on our own growth, and it is also important for us to realize that problems in this area are part of the transformation process. We have known people who struggle with problems in this area. People get divorces, wives and husbands yield to temptation, young people do things that shouldn't be done, even some pastors fail in this area. First of all, the church should proclaim the "right thing to do." We do not need to apologize for nor avoid the issue. Secondly, we need to provide training to demonstrate to people practical ways of growing and being faithful in these areas. We need to teach ourselves and our kids how to say "NO" to the temptations. The third thing (and perhaps the thing that we do the worst on) is that we need to provide help and support for people who fail in their struggle in this area. If we do the first two items, then we will have less of the third to do.