

Sexual Purity, Part 1

Selected Scriptures

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Well I want to say a personal word of thanks to Carl Brown for coming and sharing a little bit of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in his life. We talked about doing this in chapel a few months ago and we didn't get an opportunity to meet your other two children. Can they just come up here for a minute so we can all say hi to them? (Applause) It's good to see you. Now this is where you're going to go to school. Okay, thank you, Carl. Yeah, he's a real precious guy, thank you. And thank you, Todd, for coming along also.

You never know what life is going to bring to bear on you. I think back to my own son who was here I think just a little bit after you. They discovered a brain tumor that he had, as well, and I can only tell you as a parent, it is just a shock of all shocks when they start talking about your children being terminal and early ages and God has His own purposes for Mark and it turned out to be a benign tumor which hasn't had any effect since those days. But it is true that you...when you're knocked flat, you better have a foundation to hit. Of course, the only foundation that any man can lay that holds up is the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Student Life has asked if I would talk about the issue of morality and sexual purity, a very important issue. It's not...it's not just an issue out there, it's a very personal thing with me. I suppose I have heard through the years from hundreds of people over the years, "Please don't be unfaithful to your wife." "Please don't fall into sexual immorality." And I understand the fears and worries of people because it happens so frequently to people they trust, people they know, people they love. And even at my age, I still from time to time hear that. "I hope you'll never fall," is what I hear. And I understand what a horrific thing it is when somebody who represents the Lord Jesus Christ, somebody who is viewed as a teacher of divine truth, somebody who is set up as some kind of example of spiritual strength and life goes down in a flaming crash.

And I appreciate that kind of concern and I appreciate those kinds of prayers. I'm very thankful that the Lord has given me a great...a great life, a great deal of accountability around me. I am very grateful for the high expectations of people. I'm grateful that people hold me accountable. I'm grateful for fellow elders and pastors and administrators here and faculty who know me. I'm grateful for a wife who expects me to live everything I preach all the time. The woman is not realistic, but I understand. I'm grateful for children who have high expectations. I'm grateful for grandchildren who have high expectations. I want all that, I welcome all that. I want to honor the Lord Jesus Christ with my life. I never want to do anything that brings reproach upon His name. I'm grateful for the work of the Spirit in my heart. I'm grateful for the work of the Word in my heart. I'm also grateful for a father who is...he's 91 today and in all those 91 years he has never done anything to bring reproach on the name of Christ. And it was only about two months ago that he stopped teaching or preaching on

Sunday. Up until two months ago he was still proclaiming the Word every Sunday. Now he still has a radio program and he's playing old tapes. So I'm learning that you can go on even after you can't go on. Thanks to radio.

But I'm grateful for all that around me that surrounds me with the kind of things that keeps you faithful. But at the same time, I have also seen some tragic collapses and very personal things in my life. One of the young men that I was very close to, a fellow young preacher, we trained together, we went into ministry together. We pastored churches in Southern California in two different locations. We stayed in touch. We got together from time to time. And he totally scandalized the church, his own life was for all intents and purposes destroyed. His family shattered over immorality.

But even more recently, it was just a couple of months ago that it was brought to my attention that a graduate of our school here had been caught in a horrific kind of situation of ongoing indulgence with online prostitutes for a period of years...even before and after he had been married. And when I had the opportunity to talk to him, I..I really didn't want to say anything at first, I wanted to hear what he had to say. And he expressed to me that he was...he was sorry and he was repentant.

People always ask me when somebody gets caught in that situation, are they repentant? And I...my standard answer is, "I have no idea and neither do they...neither do they." The heart is still deceitful above all things and desperately wicked and there is no way to know whether they are repentant. I can't know it and they can't know it either. Only time will tell. But I said to him, I said, "I'm not sure there is one reason that I can think of to believe that you're repentant. I can't think of one reason why I would trust you not to do this again. I can't think of any reason. You've already trashed your wife, the wife of your covenant. You violated her. Whatever accountability she brought into your life, whatever blessing she was in your life, had no effect on you. Whatever expectation she had, whatever love means, it had no effect on you. And then your siblings, you trashed them, whatever expectations they had. And then your mother, your father, your grandparents, all the people you work with, all the Christian friends that you know, more than that, it wasn't even enough in your heart to receive the grace of Jesus Christ to save you eternally from sin and death and hell, that didn't mean enough to you to live a life that honors Christ. Now since you've trashed everybody, frankly who is left to restrain you? Why would I believe at this moment that you are going to now live a different life? On the basis of what am I supposed to believe that? Nothing in your life, nothing, not the teaching of the Word of God, not being under the preaching of the Word of God, none of it restrained you. Why should I believe that now all of a sudden there's something in you that's so pure that all on your own without any of that you're just going to walk out here and be holy?"

It wasn't very many months after that the same thing happened again. Only this time it happened to a man very close to me in ministry, another ongoing relationship of immorality. And I met with him and I basically said the same thing. You didn't care about your wife. You didn't care about your children. You didn't care about your fellow servants of Christ. You didn't care about any of this. Now you're telling me you're going to fix your life on the basis of what?

And I've learned that you can be at the Master's College, you can be in the ministry, you can teach the Bible, you can serve in a ministry in the church, you can have Christians all around you, breathing down your proverbial neck, and you can blow up just as fast as if you were the only Christian in a pagan environment because you lose the battle on the inside. And if you lose it on the inside, it doesn't matter what environment you're in, it doesn't matter what expectations prevail upon you, you're going to lose it. So I'm not under any illusions here. Some of you have already lost this

battle and you're just trying to stop before you get caught...before you get caught by your parents, or before you get caught by your girlfriend's parents or your boyfriend's parents, or some friends squeak and tell the truth. I mean, you're trying to figure out how you can find something within you to stop already being engaged in this kind of conduct. And I'm not...look, I'm not here to fix you, I can't. All these faculty members who have given their lives to minister to you and to teach you, they can't fix you, the Student Life staff can't do it, your pastor, your youth pastor can't do it. I'm not under any illusion that somehow I'm going to give two chapel messages and everybody's going to walk out of here and pursue holiness for the rest of their lives. All I can do is point you in the direction of what the Word of God says and it's really going to be up to you to make those kind of choices that are honoring to God.

Somebody said to me when these couple of things happened kind of back to back, "Why don't people ever change before they're caught? Why do they always have to get caught and a huge scandal occur before people decide to make better choices?" And my answer to that was I think people do change before they're caught but because they're not caught we don't know it. Right? I don't think everybody who gets involved in immorality just keeps doing it until they blow their life up, until they get caught. I think there are people who in the middle of this kind of behavior decide that they're not going to do that anymore and reach for the means of grace which God has provided to make a change in their life before a horrific scandal occurs. I think that probably goes on a lot. And I'm hopeful that it does. We know we're not perfect, and you're at an age where all of this is so very vulnerable. But if you think it stops when you get a little older, guess again. I stood by the deathbed of a man who was 78 years old and he was weeping. And I said, "Why are you weeping?" And he said, "Because I want to tell you...and he was on his way to heaven within days, he said...I just want to tell you how tragic my life has been. I've been a Christian for I don't know, several decades and...he said...I've never been able to get a victory over pornography." Seventy-eight years old. That's not really very encouraging stuff. If you cultivate a habit long enough, it becomes more and more difficult to break. But I do think there are people along the way who make the choices. This is the time to make those choices. So I just want to arm you a little bit, if I can, wherever you are. If you're in the midst of this and, you know, we're all tempted by the things around us, particularly with the blitz that we live under in this world, to begin to make those kind of choices.

I think sometimes we think, looking now at it from a biblical standpoint, that there's some magic. Look, all I can do is just tell you what the Word of God says. I can give you the Word of God on this and then you have to apply the means of grace to bring these things into personal reality in your life. But if it's any help to you, as bad as it is today, it's always been this bad. I think sometimes we think that this kind of sexual promiscuity, this kind of sex rage that goes on in our culture is something new. It really isn't.

If you were to go back, for example, in to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, that might be a good place to start. Let's say that you were invited to become a member of...somebody asked you to go to church with them and you happened to live in Corinth, okay? So somebody says, "I'd like you to come to my church." And you might say, "Well what's a church?" "Well it's a place where people who worship God go because they've been saved from sin and they're pursuing holiness," and etc. "It's a place for saints and I'd like you to come."

"Well what kind of people go to your church?"

Well, let's meet the congregation at Corinth, chapter 6 verse 9. "Do you not know the unrighteous will

not inherit the Kingdom of God. Don't be deceived neither fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers and swindlers shall inherit the Kingdom of God and such were some of you." Welcome to the First Baptist Church of Corinth. What kind of people go to your church? Ex-fornicators, ex-idolaters, ex-adulterers, ex-*malakos*, and I'll say more about that, ex-homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers. Really nice bunch. That's the church.

Sexual sin was so rampant in the ancient world in Paul's time that it was just a part of everybody's past. In fact, the Greek language has an extensive vocabulary devoted to perverted sex. There's the word *porne*. *Porne* basically means the purchasable one, the one you can buy, the harlot, the whore, the prostitute. *Porneuo* is the filthy business of prostitution. *Porneia* is fornication, sexual sin outside marriage. There's the word *malake*. A *malake* was a sex slave. There is the word *moichos*, that is the adulterer, the one who has sex outside the covenant of marriage. And there are the *heteri*, that would be a mistress for no purpose but sex, they had their *heteri*. There is the word *arsenokoites*, homosexual. And *malakos* here translated effeminate is actually a word meaning soft and it was the Greek word for the passive partner in a homosexual relationship. Listen, the Greek language, and there are more, no sense in talking about any more, covered all the ground because this was life...this was life. And when you went to church you wound up with a group of these kinds of people who had been washed.

Sexual sins were common. They were not only common, they were acceptable. These basically were designations of people we would say perverted people, but in that culture it was acceptable behavior. It was tolerated. It was even advocated. They lived in a no-shame culture. Now Christianity has had a great impact on that. When it invaded Corinth it began to change that no-shame culture by bringing biblical standards of morality in. Christianity went on to affect the western world. It jumped the Atlantic, came over here to America. Christianity affected America in really removing a no-shame culture. Christianity by bringing biblical principles of morality to bear upon society created a culture in which shame was connected to sexual sin. And we who are a little older, or a lot older, grew up in a world where harlotry, prostitution, sexual slavery, adultery, homosexuality of any kind were viewed as perversions of the rankest kind and you didn't even talk about them. I grew up in a world where if somebody was a divorcee, you barely were willing to breathe that word in public. Christianity created a certain amount of moral explanation in society that allowed people to heap shame upon those who didn't live up to that basic standard.

But as we know in the last several decades, the overwhelming encroachment of the sexual revolution in the sixties, the homosexual revolution in the eighties has created a no-shame culture. The only shame now these days is not to tolerate somebody's shameless behavior. And so we're back to the Corinthian world again. We're back in a pre-Christian world again where anything goes and everything goes and there is no shame for anything. It's just common...just common. The NCAA women's basketball championships are going on and I happened to look at a little bit of it, I wanted to see Liberty University playing LSU. That was a disaster. Boy, those poor Christian kids in that environment. But there was a commercial for the NCAA in one of the breaks and it was a commercial for a woman who is an unwed mother. "I graduated from an NCAA school and here I am with my child." This is the worst possible scenario in athletics is girl goes to college, gets pregnant without a husband and has a child. But now that's the model for NCAA women's basketball. Just really an unbelievable thing.

Yesterday on the news I noticed that there was a separation coming up with two babies that are

conjoined twins at the head. And they were introducing these little babies and in came the mother and the father who have two other children. And after the surgery they think they're going to get married. Oh, that's a thought. They're being treated as if this is absolutely acceptable, because it is.

We're back in the days of Corinth. We're back in the era of the Apostle Paul. And to help us with that, just a little bit before he wrote the 1 Corinthian letter, he wrote one to the Thessalonians and basically they're both in the same area. Thessalonica is a little bit north of Corinth in the same country of Greece. Let's look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. And this will be a passage that we can sort of dig into a little bit. And as I said in the beginning, I'm not under any illusions that I'm going to be able to fix things in your life, but I can put you in touch with the Scriptures on it.

And I'll so that, I trust. Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 4:3 through 8....1 Thessalonians 4:3 through 8. Now this is very straightforward. Verse 3, "For this is the will of God," any question about that? People say, "What is God's will. I'd like to know God's will." Well here it is. "Your sanctification," that's pretty clear, isn't it? What is sanctification? Separation from sin. This is the will of God. People saying, "Well I don't know what God's will is about this job, I don't know what God's will is about that opportunity. I'm seeking God's will for this issue and that issue." Why would God ever reveal to you His will about what is not in Scripture if you're not even willing to do the will of God that is revealed in Scripture. So start with what you know to be His will, sanctification. So this is the will of God, your sanctification.

What do you mean by that? "That you abstain from sexual immorality." Nothing unclear about that. And then he goes on to explain further. "Each one of you knows how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity but in sanctification, consequently he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you." Really powerful portion of Scripture.

Now this is the will of God, your sanctification...is pretty clear. This flies against the common sexual mentality both of the Corinthian/Thessalonica period and of today. How do people view this issue today?

Well, first of all, people are basically good and so since they're basically good and sex is a part of being human, sex is basically a legitimate way to have pleasure. Okay? We're basically good and then so therefore sex is a part of what it is to be human, therefore sex is basically good if, you know, if you don't rape somebody. Anything less than rape is good. And the other element comes in, sex is biological. It's like any other physical function, it is simply a part of our evolution and this is how we evolve and, you know, we have to do this to procreate and so it's biology. And that's it. It's purely biological. Therefore casual sex is just a form of recreation any time any one is willing.

And then it graduates a little bit into the idea that sex is the most important part of a relationship. And if you're going to get married, really sex is the most important part. I mean, I think when you're in love and you're your age and you're thinking about marriage, you think that's the most important part. I will give you a statistic that might help you think a little more realistically. The average couple, newly married couple according this report has sex three times a week, lasts eight minutes. Okay, there you've got 24 minutes of your week, what are you going to do the rest of the time? Okay? You've got a life. Is this a disappointment to you? This is reality. And then, of course, you've got the Bill Clinton

rule. The Bill Clinton rule is only intercourse counts. And what a lie that is, along with all the rest of this. The result of this is devastation, disaster, destructive families, destroyed kids, abortions. I mean, we don't need to go on to all of the stuff that flows out of it. Marriage is just too lumpy people hanging out for 50 years. Sorry. And if you're not lumpy when you start, you get lumpy pretty quick. It's not about *eros*, it's about *agape*. But, you know, we've all lived under the horrific influences of what's going on today and perversion that masquerades itself as cultural tolerance in music, movies, television, everything else.

But it was the same in Paul's day. Prostitutes, concubines, mistresses, homosexuals, pedophiles, transvestites, temple harlots, adulterers, adulteresses all over the place, they were in to pedophilia in Paul's day. And there was a no-shame culture. In fact, it was advocated it was expected. So in the light of that, let's look at the text.

Three questions, I'll just ask the first question probably this morning, maybe a little bit of a look at the second one. First question, what is the will of God? What is the command? Back to verse 2, he says, "You know what commandments we gave you." What's the command? "This is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality."

There is the general overall command, stay away from sexual sin. Sanctification, *hagiasmos*, separate, completely separate. People say, "Well how close can I get and not sin?" That's not the question. The question is, how far can I stay away? Abstain, *apechomai*, completely abstaining, this is abstinence. Abstinence is correct, not the kind of abstinence that is going on today where they follow the Bill Clinton rule of abstinence, but real abstinence from sexual immorality, *porneia*. Of course, you have to pull into play there Matthew chapter 5 where Jesus says, "If you look on a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery in your heart." So you certainly don't want to feed whatever does that on the inside, even if the act is not itself consummated. The point is, God's will is that you stay away from sex sin. And it's not to get as close as you can and avoid it, it's to stay far enough away to be completely separate. And you know what the Bible teaches. It's not that God hates sex, God designed it. Hebrews 13:4, "The marriage bed is undefiled," with your wife there is no defilement in that relationship in all its God-intended design. But apart from that, abstinence is what God commands. This is His will. In fact, people who engage in this, as I just read you from 1 Corinthians, are the kind of people who don't even go in the Kingdom. The Kingdom people don't do this as a way of life. So if you do this as a way of life, if this is the unbroken pattern of your life, then every reason rises to ask if you're even a Christian.

That is not to say Christians can't do this, they can and they do. But when true Christians fall into this kind of sin, they are very aware that it is a command violated. There is heart pain because Christians love God and love to obey His commandments. That's what He says, "If you love Me you'll keep My commandments." Yes, Christians can do it, but coming with it is grief and remorse and sadness and a desire to stop and to repent and to confess. So the basic command is pretty simple, stop...which presupposes that you can.

Then let's ask the second question, how can I keep that commandment? And for that we sort of dig in a little bit here, at least we'll look at one of three means. Number one comes in verse 4, "That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." Simple, control your body...get control of your body, that each one of you, meaning just that, every one of us, know how to possess. Let me give you a better translation of that. Gain mastery over, or gain control of, you see, it's your unredeemed flesh that is the issue, that each of you should know...this again, a very

important choice of words...to know is *aidenoi*(???) , it's often used in Greek to speak of knowing how, or having a skill, having the knowledge necessary to achieve an end, or achieve a goal. Know how to get control of your body. Know how to have mastery over your flesh. Here your body is identified as vessel...vessel, *skeuos*. Now there are some commentators who think this refers to a wife, but the Bible doesn't tell us to control your wife, nor does the Bible use the word *skeuosto* describe a wife in distinction from a husband. In 1 Peter *skeuos* is used of both implied because it says the woman is the weaker vessel, you're both vessels in that environment, it's the word vessel. But the woman being the weaker of the two vessels both being *skeuosthere*. But never is the wife a *skeuos*and the husband not, since *skeuos*means instrument or tool.

What is the instrument of sanctification that God has given us? What is the tool? It's your body. It's your body. In fact, it's used of any kind of utensil, it's used a number of times, I can think of three different times in the New Testament it's used to speak of people metaphorically. Rabbinical sources use it to refer to the body as well. So we're talking here not about controlling your wife, but controlling your body. It's about self-control. Now, I mean, that puts it in a category where I can manage it. All right, this whole deal is about self-control, that's right, getting control of myself. What do I do to get control of myself? Well Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:27 says, "I beat my body into submission." He's saying the same thing. I have to get control of my unredeemed flesh, not just the physical body but the mind and all that goes with it. In 1 Corinthians 6:12 Paul said, "I will not be mastered by anything." And then in the next verse he says, "The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord." I am not going to be mastered by anything.

You know, I've said for years in teaching to young people, "Just develop in your life habits that train you to have control of your body." And I'm not just talking about the sexual area. Just learn self-control. Just learn to create a disciplined environment. People who have trouble eating too much, or sleeping too much, or goofing off too much, or talking too much, or shopping too much, or playing games too much, or fooling with whatever too much are candidates for major disasters because they don't exhibit self-control. And when you cultivate self-control, you help yourself in all categories. Self-control, Paul says, "I beat my body into submission, I make it my slave. I want to be...in Romans 6 language...a servant of righteousness." Paul says, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which you have of God, you're not your own, you're bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your spirit and in your body which are Christ's."

And that's the primary issue, so I ask the question, how do I do that? How do I bring my body into control? Well, I have to do some positive things, that is I have to be in the Word, letting the Word wash my heart on a regular basis. I have to be winning the spiritual battle on the inside...and I'll talk a little more about that next time. I need to avoid anything that panders to that lack of self-control. I need to stay away from those temptations that come into my ears, or my eyes. And thus, walking in the Spirit I will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

But also, I think maybe this is the more dominating thing, I need to cultivate a love for the Lord. And that's what it comes down to. That's what I said to these people, you just don't love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength or you wouldn't bring such shame on His name. There are a lot of people in our lives that have influence that we don't want to disappoint. But of all people that I don't want to disappoint, the Lord is the one. Nor do I want to bring reproach on His name. I don't want to offer myself as a Christian, one who names the name of Jesus Christ, one who proclaims His truth and then embarrass Him and shame His name. You cultivate a love for Christ by your prayer life, by your time in the Word, by focusing on knowing Him. And you don't play with fire. Like read Proverbs,

Proverbs 2, Proverbs 5, Proverbs 7, stay away from the situations that capture you and snare you. Don't let your body tell you what to do and don't feed it those things that excite evil desire. Get your body under control.

Let me show you James 1, and we'll just look at that briefly, just ever so briefly and we'll come back to it next time. James 1, verse 14, "Each one is tempted when he's carried away and enticed by his own lust." It happens inside of you. "Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin, when sin is accomplished it brings forth death, don't be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing bestowed, every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights with whom there's no variation or shifting shadow." Don't blame God is what he said. Don't you be deceived. The problem is you. The problem is you. God brought you forth, verse 18, by the word of truth. You were saved in order that you might be, as it were, the firstfruits among His creatures, and that is an indication that you are supposed to be a new creation and holy and pure. Everything God has done is to make you pure. Don't be deceived, the problem is you and it's in you, it's not outside of you. And it starts with desire and then moves to deception and then becomes design and then disobedience and then death.

So how am I going to keep this commandment? How am I going to live a holy life? Number one, control your flesh, control your flesh by feeding it what builds up the spiritual man and the spiritual woman and not exposing it to those things that pander to your fallen flesh. But you have to do both. You have to do both because you can go live in a cave and contemplate your navel and have evil thoughts because the heart is evil. So you feed it what strengthens the spiritual part and you starve it of what feeds the flesh.

Question...how can I control my body? Positively feeding it that which strengthens your spiritual man. Negatively, starving it of what feeds the flesh. That's where we start and we'll pick it up on Friday from there.

Father, as we think about these things, obviously there's so much to say and the battle is not without its great challenges, but we know this, we know that if You said You want us holy, that You have also given us the means. And we'll get to that even in this passage. But, Lord, help us to know that You never ever ask more than You equip us to give and we also know that there never will be a temptation without a way out. So, Lord, I pray that You will strengthen, first of all, our resolve, strengthen our commitment not to be a casualty, not to be another disaster, not to ruin our lives and the lives of others, not to bring dishonor on Your name, not to seek outside of marriage what You have provided for marriage and marriage alone so that it can be the most wonderful, the most blessed. Help us not to corrupt ourselves and render ourselves then useless to You, cast away, as it were, because we couldn't bring the flesh under the work of the Spirit. Help us, Lord, to desire Your glory and to love You with all our heart, soul, mind and strength so that our longing is to obey You. Give us victory. Give these young people in this area and a new resolve and commitment to faithfulness to You. We pray in Your Son's name and for His honor. Amen.

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