

Guard Your Purity, Part 2

Scripture: Romans 6:12; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5

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A key and often overlooked aspect of God's goodness is that He doesn't give us commands we cannot fulfill. He doesn't taunt us with impossible directions or challenge us with tasks beyond our ability. Part of the assumption in each of God's commands to us is that, through the assistance of His Spirit, we're able to accomplish what He has commanded us to do.

So when the Lord commands His people in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 to abstain from sexual immorality, He's not holding up an unattainable standard. The command to be pure is one we're able—and expected—to follow.

In fact, the command comes with built-in instruction. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, Paul wrote:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

In simple terms, Paul says that sexual purity is a matter of developing *self-control*.

Whenever I'm speaking to college students or other young people, one of the key lessons I try to drive home is the vital importance of developing life habits that train them to have control of their bodies.

And it's not just regarding the area of sexual purity—self-control is vital in all parts of your life. People who have trouble eating too much, sleeping too much, talking too much, spending too much money, entertaining themselves too much, or who waste too much time doing nothing are candidates for *major* moral disasters. You can eliminate many of the most common pitfalls of sin through the basic discipline of self-control.

Paul was well aware of the need for self-control, even in his own life. "I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Personal discipline helps guard you from all sorts of immorality and hypocrisy.

From a biblical perspective, self-control is about gaining mastery over your body and bringing it under submission to God. "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:12). It's a matter of ignoring the desires of your flesh and disciplining yourself for the purpose of righteousness.

There are two key aspects to gaining that mastery over your body. The first is to feed on the riches of

Scripture. Consistent, faithful study of God's Word stimulates your spiritual growth, sharpens your mind, and strengthens you against temptation. Train yourself to think and live biblically, and you'll find it increasingly easier to turn away from temptation. "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

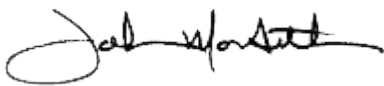
The second aspect of gaining mastery over your body is starving yourself of opportunities to sin. You know what triggers temptation in you—avoid those people, places, and things at all costs. It does you no good to develop positive patterns if you continue to expose yourself to all kinds of input that corrupts your thinking. You can't afford to toy with your desires and emotions—you've got to flee temptation and never look back.

The capper to Paul's exhortation for self-control in 1 Thessalonians 4 is his reminder of our new nature in Christ. He's calling on believers to live godly, self-controlled lives, "not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:5).

Those words echo his challenge to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." The Lord didn't sacrifice His Son and transform us into new creations just so we could wallow in the same kind of immoral filth as the world. We're no longer bound to sin—we've been set free, and we need to live like it.

Biblical purity is impossible without faithful self-discipline. Cultivating self-control is *how* we're able to avoid temptation and live the holy lives God commands us to live.

Next time we'll look at *why* that's important.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

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