
God's Dedication of Sex - Purity

Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

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Introduction

Each January, we set aside a significant time to think together about the Bible and family. This is a very important season for us as a church as we wrestle with issues we face and bring the Bible to bear on them. We often are addressing what people perceive to be felt needs, but then turning the light of the Word on those issues so that we interpret them Biblically and live in such a way as to please God.

Theme – *Biblical Theology of Sexuality*

There is no subject that so dominates our culture as the subject of sexuality. Like many pagan cultures, we are surrounded and immersed in sensuality. This important topic needs to be clearly and biblically addressed here at the Chapel. That is what we intend to do this Family Enrichment Conference.

Aims – *Biblical Purity and Passion*

Let me establish three aims for our series together.

- To call for Biblical purity and holy practice of marriage oneness. This means we must understand God's purposes, precepts and practice of marriage oneness.
- To shape our thinking by a Biblical Theology of sexuality. This means that we will range over the whole of the Bible, using Christ and the cross as the lens through which we affirm and apply truth in the context of being a New Covenant community of believers.
- To counter the world's influence in this area. We must affirm and deny. We must say not only what we are for but what we are against. And what we are against must be defined solely by the Scriptures lest we either become legalists or licentious.

Cautions – *Biblical Clarity and Discretion*

Now, we need to be clear and cautious, plain, but not offensive. We have thought carefully about this as we have prayed over and prepared for this series. I know that for many Christian people, this is never a subject to be addressed in public. Yet, the Bible speaks of it much, even dedicating one whole book of intimate poetry to the commendation and consecration of the joys of married intimacy. So here are some guidelines that we hope will encourage all of you to be here for every sermon in the series, will alleviate any concerns over your little ones, will help us to be pleasing to God as we pursue our joy in Him through our joy in one another.

- To explain to people the need and use of the series. We will, each sermon, remind you of our purposes and principles so as to hold our focus on the Word.
- To excuse younger children on Sunday Evenings to Scripture Sowers. We will be sure that little ones will not be in the auditorium so that parents with concerns over the subject matter will be addressed.
- To assure people that we will speak plainly yet hopefully, not offensively, using metaphors and euphemisms as the Scriptures do. Here is sometimes a difficult thing, given our different backgrounds and sensibilities. We will strive for the Biblical third-way – not treating sex as though it were dirty and impure and not speaking of it in dirty or impure ways.
- To be sure that teens and singles are present for the whole series. Now this might be worrisome to some. But hear me. You teens and you singles know well that you are exposed to constant bombardment of the world's view of sex and enticement to sensuality. While innocence is desirable, ignorance or worse, involvement is not. So you need to be here to hear the Scripture on this important subject lest you be more shaped by the world than the Word.
- To be sure that all flocks are interacting with the series on Wednesday Evening. It will be very important for every family to be at flock and to interact with your elders in that setting. Every flock will be helping you think through and make application of the Sunday sermons.

Now this has been a long introduction. But now, let's begin. As we begin, let's go to the Lord and ask His blessing as we open His Word together.

Prayer

We will begin by seeing how God has honored the marriage state and called for holiness in our sexual intimacy.

Let it be Honored

Hebrews 13:4

First, marriage is to be honored as pleasing to the Lord for sexual oneness. The author of Hebrews has just exhorted the believers to offer God acceptable worship or service with transforming reverence and awe in view of what God is like (12:27). He then turns this theological exhortation into practical applications right where people live.

The Lord's Instructions

WE ARE TO HONOR MARRIAGE.

God has ordained marriage. It provides the context for companionship. Its covenant union, sacrificial love and loving submission all model the relationship between Christ and the church. Even those to whom God has given the gift of singleness, marriage is not to be demeaned as though it were only a necessary, but Biblical concession. Marriage is to be honored. Whatever tends to erode it is to be avoided. Whatever openly attacks it is to be opposed. Christians must clearly and publicly affirm that marriage, that is, the covenant and physical union of one man and one woman is the Biblical standard. All else is evil.

WE ARE TO KEEP MARRIAGE INTIMACY PURE.

The phrase here “the marriage bed be undefiled” is a euphemism. It means that sexual relations are only within marriage. Immorality and adultery pollute and defile marriage. Sex is God-honoring only within marriage and certainly within marriage. As we will see, the Bible consistently frames immorality and adultery as profaning marriage. But, further, there is the possibility of defiling marriage intimacy by bringing into it patterns of thought and behavior that are sinful. Marriage intimacy may be polluted by the thought and lust life of spouses. Pornography, visual or verbal, can so control ones mind that intimacy with a spouse is filled with thoughts of lust directed *at some other individual*. This clearly is wicked and defiles our intimacy.

We must constantly be on the guard against the subtle pressures to think wrongly about marriage and sex. And some of the temptations are not subtle at all. When we as Christians are together, we ought to be talking in such a way that honors marriage. We must constantly place before our children a Biblical and wholesome approach to the sex.

The Lord's Judgment

Why is marriage to be honored and intimacy to be holy? Because we are confronted by the certainty of God, who will judge. Notice the connections – honor and keep holy because God will judge those characterized by thought and deed as immoral. There are no secret places nor hidden practices from the all searching eye of God. He knows what thoughts and lusts slither around in your heart. He knows about those sinful trysts. He not only knows about you, but He will certainly hold you accountable.

I want to make a connection here that is vital for a Biblical view of marital intimacy. It is an act of worship. It is an act of giving, of treasuring, of marriage joy.

When shared within marriage as an expression of love in a sweet relationship, it pleases God. What a glorious thing that what we can delight in as a gracious gift from His design can also please and glorify Him. This is why when we profane and pollute our marriages and intimacy, God responds with judging wrath and severe consequence.

Brothers and sisters, honor marriage and keep your intimacy undefiled.

Let us be Holy

1 Thessalonians 3:11-4:8

While we will be focusing on chapter 4:1-8, I want you to see how Paul frames his exhortation. In this short prayer for them he establishes God's purpose for holiness in every area of life including our sexuality. He prays that they will grow in their love for each other and for others (v.12). He wants it abound (*pleonasai*) and to overflow (*perisseusai*). Authentic, abounding and overflowing love will look like holiness. True godliness is an expression or outworking of true love. Loving God and loving one another is seen in godly attitudes and actions toward one another. This growing love means that we will have an authenticated holiness and be blameless before God when the Lord returns (v.13).

So here is our prayer and purpose for you as well: we aim to see each you growing ever more in love for each other so that you will be blameless before our great God when He returns.

Now, an large and high aim like this must have real and practical directions lest loving holiness becomes mostly about theory and not practice. So, in verses 1-8 of chapter 4, we are shown how to be constantly growing in our knowing how to be pleasing to the Lord in our sexuality.

The Progress Expected

(v.1)

Progress is expected in what they received. They were grounded in truth and practice. Paul instructions to them come with life context and teaching as a foundation. They had received from his ministry how they ought to live and how to be pleasing to God. They were following that direction in their lives now.

Progress is expected in how they respond. They were to be growing in truth and practice. Present levels of practical application in wisdom are expected to develop. They are to live and please God more and more. Thus, the words and warnings that follow.

The Precepts Taught

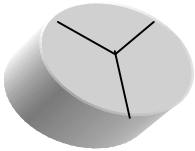
(v.2-6)

The instruction for practical holiness in sex comes in the Word of God to us (v.2) and as the will of God for us (v.3). The instructions Paul gave were through Christ and an expression of God's directive will. These instructions are coming with all the authority of the Word of God. These are not options which we can adopt or reject as it suits us. This is the will of God where we must carefully obey. Why is this so? These are the *instructions* they had received before (v.1). These are the *commandments of the Lord* he had given before (v.2). These are the *will of God* in sanctification (v.3). So they had been instructed by the command-

ments of the Lord so that they knew what the will of God is. This was not simply Paul writing, but is God directing.

The will of God for us is in the work of self-control by us. (v.4) God's will is not primarily about what career you are in, where you go to college or where you live. The will of God is in your sanctification, in obeying His precepts in such a grounded and growing way that He is pleased with you. So here is God's will – your sanctification.

Sexual purity is a part of your sanctification. Paul approaches it here as three pieces of a pie.



ABSTAIN FROM IMMORALITY.

The Scripture is clear. The word here not only means not to do it, but to distance yourself from it. Teens and singles - you are particularly open to temptation to immorality. All immorality is simply sin. You must not do it. Even in Christian schools we are prone to give all the worldly reasons for avoiding sexual sins: the potential for STD's and AIDS, the emotional effects, long-term affects on marriage. I want to give you the only reason that really matters: *GOD SAID DON'T.*

Husbands and wives - do all you can to protect your spouse from temptation and to provide for their needs in this area. A husband or wife who is withholding themselves may be sinning against God and making their spouse more susceptible to temptation. Husbands and wives—be totally satisfied with each other.

CONTROL YOUR OWN BODY.

Now there is some discussion over the original language here. Without going into all the argument, I would agree with the ESV and the NASB in their rendering here. Every believer must *know how* to control their body (literally, *vessel*) in holiness and honor. We must know how and when we are tempted. We must know how to respond to the particulars of our temptations. Further we must learn to control ourselves, to be grounded and growing in self-discipline. The unmarried must wait in self-disciplined holiness. The married must exercise self-discipline to focus on your spouse and not to wander in eye or thought. Brothers and sisters, without self-control and self-discipline, there can be no holiness, no sanctification.

The command is reinforced with a contrast. Live in self-control not in self-indulgence. Those in the world simply are controlled and dominated by their passions, both heart and physical. Make no mistake, Paul is not just pointing to physical self-indulgence but lust as uncontrolled passion. And the reason the Gentiles live like this is because they do not know God; but you do, so live like it.

You can overcome because you know God; this makes all the difference! Paul did not say that the heathen do not know *about* God. The reason they behave as they do is because they do not know God in a believing way, even though they may know about Him. When you come to know God, to believe in Him and to bow to Him, not only do your attitudes toward sex change, but

you also discover that God gives you the ability to act toward sexual temptation as you could not before. Knowing God is basic to living a holy life. This is why maintaining a vital relationship with God is essential to maintaining a clean walk before God.¹

DO NOT WRONG ONE ANOTHER.

Here is a concept that we have little understood. An expanded translation would sound like this: “Do not disregard and cross over the bounds and thus defraud your brother in this matter of immorality by sinning with his wife or daughter.” Now why would he say this? Why would he couch this in terms that sound like a contract or an agreement?

Because we are a community covenanted together, to have sex outside of marriage with anyone who is not your spouse and whose family is in church is to transgress the covenant and to steal by fraud and deceit what is not your own. This is why the church must rise up and discipline all such sin. God has forbidden it. It is a violation of our covenant community. We are first, brothers and sisters, then we are husbands and wives.

Those of you who are not married are not exempt from this warning. Current immorality also robs you and your future spouse of the fullness of marital joy. You will bring to your marriage thoughts and memories and expectations that are intended to be developed with your spouse alone. I am speaking here not only of physical sex, but of fantasy sex through pornography and erotic literature. All present sin, though it can be forgiven, has consequences. Lots of little marriage destroying foxes are bred through impurity.

God will not allow sins in this area to go unnoticed and uncorrected (v.6b). Be assured that those around you may not know and may never know. But God will prosecute in the court of His providence. He will move as a stern father to chasten and correct.

The Purpose Explained

(v.7-8)

Paul stresses the importance of these commands through two important warnings.

In its Aim

(v.7)

The purpose of grace in sanctification is not license. God has summoned and separated us to Himself and away from sin. Salvation has sanctification as its immediate project and glorification as its chief end. Therefore, we are called to become holy. Salvation is a calling out of God's people to God from sin. While we tend to think of it as deliverance from hell, we need to focus, as the Bible does, on our salvation and sanctification as deliverances from sin to our Sovereign and Savior.

¹ Adapted from Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

In its Authority

(v.8)

To carry on and say that this is just man's perspective and man's word is to reject God who gives us the Spirit to sanctify us. When we reject the commands and warnings of the Word of God, we are rejecting the God of the Word. What Paul says in this text and, under God, what we will say in this series will give shape to that holiness in our world, in our culture. While we may give practical advice at some points, our primary aim is to define the boundaries of holiness and illuminate wisdom in the areas of freedom.

Finally, the Holy Spirit has been given to us in order to bring about our sanctification. He is to teach us, to convict us and to correct us through the Scripture. He is the power of God's grace energizing our consciences, our minds and our wills to excel in pleasing God.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by highlighting some important lessons.

LET US FIND THE HIGH ROAD, THE THIRD WAY, IN OUR VIEW OF BIBLICAL SEXUALITY. Let us not be down slope and view it as secret, dirty, necessary animal function not to be discussed from Scripture except with thundering denunciations. And let us not go so down slope the other way that we shame and sully and stain what was given as a pure and passionate and pleasurable expression of the great joys of marital love.

BE MOTIVATED TO GODLINESS BY BIBLICAL MOTIVATIONS. The Bible exhorts and encourages our sexual purity by both vertical and horizontal means. Abstinence is not primarily to avoid disease but to please God.

CONSTANTLY UPHOLD MARRIAGE AS HONORABLE AND DESIRABLE. We must resist the world's way of treating it with casual and corrupting disregard. We have come to the point that living together, sleeping together, having sex together is not much different than choosing a restaurant you prefer. Prize it and treasure it.

AVOID ALL THAT CORRUPTS YOUR PRESENT AND FUTURE INTIMACY. We will talk more about this in future messages. But I want now to wave the banner over self-control and not self-indulgence in how you feed your eyes and your ears. Let us do so, not because we are some sort of holy prudes, but because we will pursue our holy pleasure in God and what He consecrates and commends.

MAINTAIN YOUR PURITY BY KNOWING GOD INTIMATELY AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER PASSIONATELY. This is at the heart of Biblical holiness – to so believe, love and know God and to so love one another that we think and want, act and feel in ways that are pleasing to God.

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. [ESV]

Message Review

To call for respecting marriage just as God has honored marriage

Aim

- To demonstrate the high place God has established for marriage.
- To show how God has made intimacy one of marriage joys.
- To show how God has protected intimacy within marriage.
- To establish and enforce the verticalness of intimacy and immorality.
- To call for God's kind of hatred for immorality and impurity.

Agenda

Marriage is to be honored and sexual intimacy to be undefiled because of God, His standards and His judgment or chastening.

Summary

We are to grow in knowing God and loving one another with an emerging practical holiness in our sexuality. This purity comes through staying away from immorality, constant self-control and careful attention to our covenantal community.

**Discussion
Questions**