

Maintaining Moral Purity

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7

As Americans, we care a lot about purity in some areas and in others we could not care less. For instance, we want pure air to breathe, pure water to drink and we want pure food to eat. **But we are not really that concerned about moral purity.**

As a result of our complacency, we have more abortions today than ever before, we have more illegitimate births than ever before, and we have more people with sexually transmitted diseases than ever before. **Nine million Americans carry a venereal disease.** That is more people with a sexually transmitted disease than people with alcoholism.

The Bible says something very different. In 1 Thessalonians 4 this is what God says about you, "God wants you to be pure and to keep clear of all sexual sin. For God has not called us to be dirty-minded and full of lust but to be holy and clean."

As I read that verse, I ask, is that possible in today's world? Is it even possible to live in a world where I am bombarded constantly by billboards and media in this sex saturated society to maintain a pure mind?

I think it is. Let me give you the reason why. If you have ever gone ocean fishing and catch an ocean fish and prepare it, the fish has lived its entire life in salt water. **It grows up in a culture where ever moment of its life, it is surrounded by brine, water that is so salty you can't drink it yourself or you will get sick.** Yet when you catch a bass or fish that has lived its entire life in the ocean and you bring it home and prepare it for a meal, before you eat it, you have to put salt on it.

Tonight we are going to look at what the Bible says about moral purity. God gives us five steps in remaining pure in a polluted world.

1. I must make a commitment to God's standard. Psalm 119:9 says, "How can anyone keep his way pure? By living according to your Word." **You have to decide on what is going to be your standard of authority? On what am I going to base my life?**

God says several things in His word that are not very popular. God says a number of things, particularly about sex, in His word that you may ask, "Why does He say that?" Because He knows more about sex than you do. And He knows more about sex than I do. **He understands the implications far better.** Therefore, you have to decide if you are going to follow God's standard!

When it comes to sex, God invented it in the first place. God thought up the whole idea of sex. He thought the whole thing up. **And yet God has also put some parameters around it.** And God's standard has never changed. God's standard is very clear regardless of opinion polls or anything else.

God reminds us that sex is far more than physical pleasure. Sex is a spiritual act and it has spiritual consequences. Not only that, sex has emotional consequences, it has social consequences, it even has legal consequences. **If sex were just physical, it would be like a handshake.** It would not matter whom you had sex with. **But it is much more than physical.**

That is the problem with sex education. A lot of people think that the problem with sex education in school is that they teach too much and the kids are going to go out and try it. No, they already know! **They are not going to learn anything new in the sex education classes that they have not already picked up on the street.** The problem with sex education classes is they do not teach enough. They do not tell it all.

God says, "It is more than just physical." **The Bible also says that sex is exclusively reserved for a husband and a wife who are committed to each other in a marriage.** God says that anything outside of that - sex before marriage, sex outside of marriage, anything else - will have profound consequences in your emotions, in your spiritual life, and maybe even physically harm you in a certain way because of numerous diseases you can pick up from promiscuity.

Why does God say this? Why did God put parameters on sex? Because He knows more about it.

Therefore, I suggest that the starting point to remaining pure in a polluted world is you make a commitment to God's standard.

2. I must manage my mind. Every temptation starts in the mind. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Be careful how you think, your life is shaped by your thoughts."

Proverbs 23:19 says, "Keep your mind on what is right." **The battle is won or lost here.** When you have an open mind it tends to get filled with garbage. What you need to do is watch what you think about.

Anytime you see somebody really messing up their life, it did not start with the actions, it started with thoughts. They were thinking dumb thoughts before they started making dumb decisions. The Bible says very clearly, and science backs this up, the way you think determines how you feel. **Thoughts determine feelings.** You feel a certain way because you are thinking a certain way. God says your thoughts control your life.

This is how you fall into temptation. This is how affairs happen. Affairs just do not happen. Long before the actual physical act takes place, little decisions have been made that lowered the barrier.

First, it starts with accepting sinful thoughts in my mind. "What would it be like to go to bed with that person? I wonder if it's so wrong? Did God really say..." And you start having doubts and you start fantasizing in your mind. It starts there.

Second, is the emotional non-physical involvement. That is where you start flirting. You start making gestures and comments, saying, "I'm available."

Third, comes the physical involvement. With the physical involvement comes the guilt and the emptiness.

Fourth comes rationalizing my actions. "Everybody is doing it. It is no big deal. We are both adults." Etc. God says, "Who are you kidding?"

2 Timothy 2:22 tells us how to manage our minds, "Turn your back on lustful thoughts and give your positive attention to goodness, integrity, love, and peace." **It says turn away and turn toward.** This is how you break a temptation. Long before you act wrong, you are thinking wrong and the way you stop that is by turning your back on what you are thinking about.

Turning your back implies a choice and it is. You have a choice. You do not have to give in to temptation. **It is not a sin to be tempted.** But it is a sin to give in to temptation. How do you break any temptation? **I do not care what it is, if you want to break a bad habit, the key is not resisting.** The key is **replacing** and **refocusing**.

3. I must minimize the opportunity for temptation. That means do not place myself in a situation where I know I am going to be tempted. I must minimize the opportunity for temptation. **If you do not want to get stung, you stay away from the bees.** If I do not want to get burned, I stay away from the fire. If I have a problem with alcohol, I do not go to bars to eat pretzels.

There are three ways you can minimize temptation in your life.

1) I must recognize what tempts me. Recognize the situations that turn me on, stimulate me, that get me thinking in other directions. 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, "Be careful. If you're thinking, 'Oh, I'd never behave like that' let this be a warning to you. For you too may fall into sin." **He is saying be alert, be wise, be aware.** You need to know the early warning signs of temptation so you can bail out early.

2) I must choose my friends carefully. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Bad companions ruin good character." That means you need to choose your friends wisely. That means you need friends who will encourage you to go in the right direction for your life.

3) I must establish some protective guidelines. Common sense rules about what you will and will not do with a person of the opposite sex. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:3, "But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality." You need to sit up some guidelines for your personal life.

4. I must maintain my marriage. That means that a growing relationship with my spouse will reduce the pull and attraction of adultery or any other kind of relationship. Ecclesiastes 9:9 says, "Enjoy life with your wife whom you love." **That means putting some effort back into your relationship.** The reason people get tempted after they are married is because we stop dating in our marriage. All the things we did before we were married, after a few years we get too busy and we stop doing those things that keep the spark, the romance going.

The Bible is very clear about maintaining your marriage. It is very practical too. 1 Corinthians 7 says, "A husband should not deprive his wife of sexual intimacy which is her right as a married woman. Nor should the wife deprive her husband. Do not cheat each other of normal sexual relations or you will expose yourself to the obvious temptation of Satan." **If the excitement is found at home, you are not going to be looking elsewhere.**

The experts have discovered a very scientific study that shows that husbands like to make love on days that start with "T" - Tuesday, Thursday, Today, Tomorrow, Taterday and Tunday. Very scientific study!

You need to kiss your mate every day. Kissing is the barometer of the state of your marital relationship.

Make sure you are committed to spending some times together every day. Your marriage relationship must continue to be high priorities. Be cautious of commitments that rob you of time with one another.

Keep physically fit and well groomed. Be neat and clean even around the house.

Keep a positive attitude. Be very, very careful about developing a critical attitude because it will destroy your life. Look for something positive in your mate and learn to "enjoy" each other!

5. I must magnify the consequences of sin. I want to say; nothing damages your emotions more than sexual sin. God made you to be a sexual being. **He made you a woman or he made you a man.** God says that is good. He made *men* to be men and *women* to be women. And since your sexuality invades every single part of your life, it is not just a physical act. Therefore, when a sexual sin is committed – your mate feels violated. The Bible says this, "Anyone who commits adultery doesn't have any sense. He's destroying himself." The Bible says in Proverbs 6:26, "Immorality may cost your life."

Regardless of what has happened in your past, God gives you a new start tonight, a chance to start over, to come clean and be pure the rest of your life. I have been married to Linda nearly 54 years and she is the only woman I have ever really loved. By the grace of God, I intend that to be true to her for the rest of my life.

Why in the world would I make a commitment like that? Three reasons:

1. I love Jesus Christ. He gave His life for me. He died on the cross and I owe Him everything I have and one day I want to go be with Him in heaven. Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments"

2. I love my wife and my kids with all my heart. The thought of the pain that it would bring to them if I were sexually unfaithful and the scars that would cause on my wife and my children and the shame is a thought that is almost unbearable for me to even think of. It is so painful to consider what that would bring upon the people I love the most.

3. Because I fear the judgment of God. It is a healthy fear. I would suggest that if you do not, you better get it quick. The Bible says in Hebrews 13:4 "God will judge the sexually immoral" The Bible says this in 1 Corinthians 10, "Remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. (In other words, we are all in the same boat. We all have the same temptations.) And God is faithful. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so you will not give in to it." **There is no irresistible temptation.** God says, "I will show you a way out."

This is a serious issue. This is what Jesus Christ died on the cross for. It is your choice.