

Sexual Purity

Why is maintaining sexual purity so vital to the life of a Christian?

Moral purity is not a devious plan to eliminate enjoyment from a Christian's life, though Satan deceptively threatens such a loss. Instead, purity is God's infinitely wise foundation for true happiness and long-lasting family relationships.

The Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths has pronouncements about sanctification (separation from evil and dedication to God) and "the alarming erosion of national moral standards" (worldliness). But we must turn directly to Scripture for the Assemblies of God position on sexual purity.

We believe that the biblical standards of morality are universal and timeless. They are applicable to all generations, to all societies, and to all subcultures. They apply to New York, Los Angeles, Singapore, and your community just as much as they applied to biblical Corinth and Rome.

Today's society is obsessed with sex. The question Christians must ask: How should we as followers of Christ, living in an increasingly secular and amoral society, behave concerning sexual activity? Certainly not as atheists and agnostics behave! One way to recognize a Christian today should be by his or her sexual purity. Yet it is difficult to maintain purity in a culture obsessed with sex and permissiveness toward all forms of sexual expression. That difficulty makes sexual purity a good test of who really is a follower of Christ. It takes more than the best effort of natural humanity to maintain sexual purity. It takes the redeeming and sanctifying work of God in our lives.

Some of the words Paul addressed to the Corinthians could well be spoken to today's "Corinthian" society. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans" (1 Cor. 5:1). "The sexually immoral . . . will [not] inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9). "The body is not meant for sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:13). "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18). "Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2). "We should not commit sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 10:8). And after the admonitions in his first letter were not heeded, Paul said in his second Corinthian letter, "I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged." (2 Cor. 12:21).

Paul knew the power of sexual drive in all individuals. He knew that provocative dress, public gossip about sexual orgies, and sexually charged humor were

strong incitements to lust and sin. And he knew that sexual temptations came no matter what a person's situation might be. So to the married he said, "Do not deprive each other [of intimate sexual relations] except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7:5). Paul knew that withheld sexual relations could lead a spouse into temptation and sin.

Single persons are also called to sexual purity. "To the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried . . . But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion [engage in immoral behavior]" (1 Cor. 7:8,9). It is clear from these accumulated passages that having sexual relations outside of marriage is forbidden, and for good reason: sexual immorality destroys personal relationships and a secure society.

What constitutes sexual immorality? According to the Bible it includes adultery, fornication, homosexuality, incest, prostitution, rape, and lust. The popular culture around us is suggesting with a loud voice that anything short of sexual intercourse is not sex and therefore not sinning. But that definition of sex does not line up with the Bible. Jesus said, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

The biblical word to younger singles is "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Tim. 2:22). Sexually stimulating touch and physical intimacy between a man and a woman are part of the natural progression that in marriage leads to intercourse. Engaging in such activity before entering into a lifetime commitment of marriage is lust rather than love. It is selfish gratification of one's own pleasure rather than a proper concern for the welfare of the partner. God is able to help young couples desiring a committed Christian marriage to preserve themselves for a beautiful marriage of trust and faithfulness.

Control of the mind and its wandering thoughts is the key to sexual purity in dating and courtship. If the mind dwells on immediate physical gratification, the chances for a loving, committed marriage are greatly reduced. But if dating is seen as a time of getting to know the person who lives inside the body, rather than exploring the body, the possibility of a permanent Christian marriage can become a reality that God can bless.

The apostle Paul was fully aware of the temptations that can lead one into sexual impurity and sin. He warned Timothy, a young man, at least three times. "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." (1 Tim. 4:12). Timothy was admonished to relate to women in a pure manner, "older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (1 Tim. 5:2). And again, "Do

not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure" (1 Tim. 5:22). God has promised great reward to those who behave with purity because their hearts are pure-"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8).

CONCERNS:

The absorption of today's society with sex and sexual stimulation is fast approaching the degradation of societies that God has had to judge and destroy in the past. Only a wholehearted commitment to sexual purity by our Christian youth will restrain the headlong plunge toward social self-destruction. Yet the evil influences of pagan attitudes toward sex and relationships subtly affect even the church world. One can easily reason, if "everyone is doing it" and no judgment has fallen, maybe biblical standards are outmoded and outdated. But God's standards of morality have not changed, and He blesses those who obey His wise rules set up for our preservation and welfare. Sexual purity before and throughout marriage is God's plan for mankind. As always, His way pays rich dividends, often in the form of successful lifelong marriage unions.