

THREE BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR SEXUAL PURITY

6 ¹²Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food—but God will do away with both of them. Now the body is not intended for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. ¹⁴By his power God raised the Lord [from the dead] and he will raise us also. ¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? God forbid. ¹⁶Do you not realize that he who has intimate relations with a prostitute is one [with her in] body?—for it says, “The two shall become one flesh.” ¹⁷But he who is in union with the Lord is one [with him in] spirit. ¹⁸Flee from fornication. Every [other] sin that a man commits is without the body, but he who commits fornication is sinning against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not realize that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You do not belong to yourself; ²⁰you were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your body. (1 Cor. 6:12-20)

Introduction

To be or not to be—sexually active. This is the question. According to statistics, 50% of teenagers answer “Yes” to the question, “Are you sexually active?” Some become sexually active while they are still in junior high school (age 12-14.)

To be or not to be sexually active. This is the question. How about the 50% who answer “No” to the question, “Are you sexually active?” How do they refrain? What is their reasoning?

Millie says, “If you are going to be sexually active or not sexually active you have to make that decision ahead of time, before you go out with someone.” According to Jane, “The pressure starts in Junior High School. It’s better to be equipped with an answer. Junior High School kids need the knowledge to make the best choice they can.” Kelly explains, “(When I date) I make it clear at the beginning and say, ‘If you don’t like it, you can leave.’” Two important things come out in these comments: First, the pressure to engage in immoral sexual conduct comes early; second, you had better know in advance how you are going to respond to that pressure.

All of us living in modern society are confronted with manifold temptations to engage in some form or another of sexual immorality. Because, as Christians, our bodies belong to the Lord, (and we do not want to experience the judgment that is coming upon the world,) let us be careful to heed the biblical guidelines for sexual purity that are presented to us in 1 Corinthians 6.

I. Realize the Significance of Your Body (6:12-15)

The Corinthians had properly applied the principle of Christian liberty—*“everything is permissible”*—to the use of food. They recognized that they were

not a part of the Old Testament era under which the people of God had to abstain from certain types of food. They understood that the Old Testament commandments to abstain from certain types of food were designed by the Lord to be a teaching device, intended to graphically and symbolically remind His Old Testament people that they were holy unto God and were not free to indulge in the practices of the world that is coming to judgment—but with the coming of Christ, the Old Testament ceremonial laws were set aside. The Corinthians recognized that the Lord has made a wide variety of foods and has granted us the freedom to enjoy those foods.

But the Corinthians were wrong when they sought to apply this principle (*“everything is permissible”*) to the use (or misuse) of sex. Their reasoning appears to have been as follows: We may satisfy the body with any food we desire, may we not also satisfy the body with any sexual experience we desire?

At this point the Apostle Paul corrects their misuse and abuse of Christian liberty (vs.13.) He acknowledges that it is true that the stomach is made for food, as taught in the Old Testament Scriptures. There is God’s original commandment given to Adam and Eve: *“Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food’”* (Gen. 1:29.) Then there is the LORD’s additional word spoken to Noah after the Great Flood: *“Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything”* (Gen. 9:3.) But it is not true that the body was made for fornication, (i.e.; any and every form of sexual experience.) On the contrary, with regard to sex, the body was made for the fulfillment of the sexual desire within the bonds of marriage, note Genesis 2:24, *“a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”*

The apostle goes on to inform us, *“the body is not intended for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body.”* *“The body is intended for the Lord.”* In positive terms, this statement is explained by such a passage as Romans 12:1, *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”* In negative terms, this statement is explained by such a passage as Ephesians 5:3,5-7,

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity or greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people ...⁵Of this you can be sure, No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be partners with them. (Eph. 5:3,5-7)

But Paul also declares, *“the Lord is for the body.”* That is to say, the Lord gave Himself not only to redeem our soul, but also our body, note Philippians 3:20-21,

... our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹By the power that enables him to bring everything into submission to himself, he will transform the body [belonging to the present state] of our humiliation, so that it may be conformed to his glorified body. (Phil. 3:20-21)

The view that the body is of no true and lasting value, and therefore can be employed for any kind of sexual experience, is not biblical. As revealed in Genesis 2:7, God has created man as a combination of soul and body *“Jehovah God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”* The final redemption shall include the redemption of the body as well as the soul, as the Apostle Paul affirms in such a passage as Philippians 3:20-21, and as he will declare to the Corinthians in chapter 15 of this present epistle. We would never think of giving our soul to the devil; as Christians, we should not submit our body either when he tempts us to engage in sexual immorality.

In verse 14 the apostle emphasizes the significance of the body. *“God raised the Lord [from the dead.]”* God the Father resurrected Jesus’ body from the grave and transformed it into a glorified body, thereby demonstrating the value of the body. *“[God] will raise us also.”* The resurrection of Jesus is not an isolated case; on the contrary, Jesus is *“the first fruits”* of a final resurrection, note 1 Corinthians 15:20-23,

... now [the fact is] Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep [in death]. ²¹Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. ²²Just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own turn: the first fruits, [which is] Christ; then those who belong to Christ when he appears [in glory]. (1 Cor. 15:20-23)

In verse 15 Paul further emphasizes the significance of the body by reminding us that as Christians our bodies are *“members of Christ.”* Not only our souls, but also our bodies, belong to Christ, are inhabited by His Holy Spirit, and share in His spiritual life: *“Do you not realize that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?**”* (1 Cor. 6:19.) *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question and Answer #37, states this biblical truth as follows:

What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

*The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; **and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.***

Here, then, is the first biblical guideline for sexual purity: we must realize the significance of our body. Our bodies have been claimed by Christ, being presently occupied by His Holy Spirit. They will be redeemed by Christ at the final resurrection, and they are intended for the most intimate communion with Christ, being spiritually united to Him and thus becoming a member, or part, of Him.

II. Realize the Significance of the Sexual Relationship (6:16-17)

In verse 16 the apostle reminds the Corinthians and us, *“he who has intimate relations with a prostitute is one [with her in] body.”* The man who has a sexual relationship with a prostitute *“becomes one [with her in] body.”*

To indicate the profoundness of sexual intercourse the apostle refers to Genesis 2:24, *“a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”* When a man and a woman engage in the sexual act there occurs a profound unity in which they become *“one flesh”*—there is the uniting of bodies and spirits resulting in the experience of a unique oneness. Consider our Lord’s teaching on the subject of marriage and the sexual relationship, which is intended to be experienced within the bonds of marriage: *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one”* Note the testimony of a teenage girl who cannot understand how young people can deal with the emotional cost of an intimate sexual relationship, because, in her words, “along with your body, you’re giving your mind away” (*The Sheboygan Press*, 9/11/94.)

This profound relationship, which God intended exclusively for marriage, and which is on a human level a model of the Christian’s relationship with Christ, must never be cheapened or abused by engaging in any type of sexually immoral act. Note that whereas verse 16 refers to the committing of a sexual act with a prostitute, verse 18 speaks in the broadest terms when it commands us to *“flee fornication”*—fornication is a general term that covers all acts of sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

In verses 16-17 the apostle draws the contrast between being united to a prostitute, (or any other sexual union outside of marriage,) and being united to Christ. If a man engages in a sexual relationship with a prostitute, he becomes one with her in body; there is a union, but that union is essentially physical, earthly, and immoral. A man *“who is in union with the Lord is one [with him in] spirit.”* This union is of a spiritual nature, (involving the person of the Holy Spirit,) it pertains to the immediate realm of God and it is sacred.

The apostle brings out this contrast in order to emphasize two facts. First, as Christians, we are in a relationship with Christ, a relationship we must not violate by entering into immoral sexual relationships of any kind. Second, our relationship with Christ is far superior to any illicit relationship we might be tempted to pursue.

Here, then, is a second biblical guideline for sexual purity: we must appreciate the significance of the sexual relationship—it involves a physical, emotional, and spiritual union, one which God has intended exclusively for marriage, and which is a model of our relationship with Christ.

III. Heed the Exhortations of Scripture (6:18-20)

In verse 18 we are confronted with the commandment, *“flee from fornication.”* The reason is provided in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10,

Do you not realize that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor those who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

An example, one to which the apostle seems to be alluding, is provided by Joseph as recorded in Genesis 39:6b-12,

Now Joseph was well built and handsome, ⁷and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, Come to bed with me! ⁸But he refused. With me in charge, he told her, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. ⁹No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? ¹⁰And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her. ¹¹One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. ¹²She caught him by his cloak and said, Come to bed with me! But he left his cloak in her hand and fled out of the house. (Gen. 39:6b-12)

The wholesome alternative to immoral pursuits is presented to us in 2 Timothy 2:22, *“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.”*

In verse 19 comes the reminder that as a Christian, our body is a temple, or sanctuary, of the Holy Spirit. Our very bodies are the sacred residences of the Holy Spirit, which may not be desecrated with impunity: *“If anyone desecrates the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, [and this is] what you are”* (1 Cor. 3:17.)

In verse 20 we are given the commandment to glorify God with our bodies. The reason we are to do so is to be found in the fact that we have been purchased with the blood of Christ and no longer belong to ourselves but to God who loves us and has made us His own.

Conclusion

Not only young people, but all of us, are confronted with the temptation to engage in acts of sexual immorality. Because of the nature of the world and the society in which we find ourselves, it is imperative that we pay close attention to these three biblical guidelines for sexual purity: 1) Let us realize the significance of our bodies; 2) Let us realize the significance of the sexual relationship; and 3) Let us heed the exhortations of Scripture as found in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, namely, that we flee from fornication and that we glorify God with our bodies.