

PRACTICE MORAL PURITY

5³But fornication, indeed, all moral impurity, or covetousness, should not [even] be mentioned among you, as is proper for saints. 4Nor [should there be any] indecent behavior or foolish talk or vulgarity, such things are not appropriate; but rather, [let there be] the giving of thanks. 5Of this you can be certain, no immoral or impure person nor any greedy man—who 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 these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7Therefore, do not be a participant with them [in their sins]. 8Previously, you were [part of the] darkness, but now you [belong to the] light in the Lord; [therefore,] walk as children of light—⁹the fruit of the light [consists of] all goodness and righteousness and truth—¹⁰demonstrating what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Do not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead rebuke them, ¹²for it is shameful to even speak about the things that they are doing in secret. ¹³But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light; ¹⁴indeed, everything that has become visible is evident. For this reason he says, “Awake, O sleeper, even rise from the dead!” and, “Christ will shine upon you.” (Eph. 5:3-14)

Introduction

Mr. Sanders works with youth in a Milwaukee school. He estimates that half of his students are presently or in the recent past have been “sexually active”—Mr. Sanders works with students in grades five through eight.

Seventh graders at a Sheboygan, Wisconsin, middle school estimate that at least 50% of their classmates have had sex at least once.

Some people would maintain that it’s “only natural” for teens to explore and to experiment and to experience sex. Others are of the opinion that right or wrong, sex among teens is so rampant that all one can hope for is to instruct the young people on how to have “safe sex.” But others are of the opinion that teens are not ready for sex, as one 12th grader expressed it: “We’re not mature enough to handle it, emotionally or physically. We’re not mature enough to handle the responsibility of sex.”

What do you think? What is your view concerning teens and sex? Concerning adults and sex? More importantly, what does the LORD say? What instruction does He give us in His Word, the Bible? We may summarize His instruction to us contained in this passage of Ephesians 5:3-14 in three words: Practice Moral Purity.

I. Practice Moral Purity, ...in Word and in Deed (5:3-4, 4:29)

As Christians, we are to abstain from *“fornication and all moral impurity.”* *“Fornication”* refers to sexual activity practiced by unmarried persons. *“All moral*

impurity” refers to all forms of sexual deviance and perversity, such as what is described in Romans 1:24,26-27,

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another ...²⁶... God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.²⁷In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Rom. 1:24,26-27)

Not only are we to abstain from such acts, we are also to abstain from such conversation: such things *“should not [even] be mentioned among you.”* We are to avoid pornographic magazines, videos, movies, T.V. shows, etc. We are not to engage in coarse, vulgar humor. We are not show an eagerness to hear such jokes; we are certainly not to repeat them. On the contrary, we should let it be known that we are not interested in such “humor.”

In order to practice moral purity in word and in deed, it is important to have a right view of sex. The sexual relationship is sacred; is has been created by God exclusively for marriage, and designed by God to reflect the relationship between Christ and His church: *““a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”³²This is a profound mystery, now I am speaking about Christ and the church”* (Eph. 5:31-32.)

The abuse of the sexual relationship is selfish. Note that Ephesians 5:3 speaks of *“fornication, moral impurity and covetousness.”* The abuse of the sexual relationship in immorality is selfish in the sense that it is self-fulfilling, self-centered, self-gratifying, using the other person for one’s own selfish fulfillment. Contrast the description of fornication with the description of the marriage relationship given in Ephesians 5:25, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”* Young ladies, if your boyfriend really loves you, he will respect you and wait for marriage, he will not force you to engage in fornication as a means of demonstrating your love for him. Young men, if you really love her you will respect her and wait until marriage before engaging in the act of intercourse.

How do we practice moral purity in word and in deed? We do so by guarding our heart and spirit, as the LORD instructs us through the prophet Malachi, *“guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth”* (Mal. 2:15b.) As the Lord Jesus teaches in Matthew 15:19, *“out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”* Just as the godly father of Proverbs invites his son to *“give me your heart,”* so does our heavenly Father instruct us do to the same: *“My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways,²⁷for a prostitute is a deep pit and a wayward wife is a*

narrow well. ²⁸Like a bandit she lies in wait, and multiplies the unfaithful among men” (Prov. 23:26-28.)

We practice moral purity in word and in deed by causing our lives to be ruled by integrity and a higher loyalty—if you are single, the loyalty of remaining pure for your future husband or wife; if you are married, the loyalty of remaining true to your husband or wife; above all, the loyalty of remaining pure for the Lord Jesus. Note how loyalty governed Joseph’s conduct and guarded him from committing adultery with Potiphar’s wife:

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. 39:7-12)

We practice moral purity in word and in deed by developing true Christian friendships; note the Apostle Paul’s counsel to young Timothy, recorded in 2 Timothy 2:22, *“Flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”*

II. Practice Moral Purity, ...to Avoid the Judgment of God (5:5-7)

Verse 5 makes it emphatically clear that those who practice a life-style of moral impurity have no place in the kingdom of God. Note also such passages as ...

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)

Now the works of the sinful nature are well known, [such as]: sexual immorality, moral impurity, debauchery, ²⁰idolatry, witchcraft, hatreds, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and other such things. I warn you [again], just as I [previously] warned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

Nothing impure will ever enter it [i.e.; the city of God], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev. 21:27)

Verse 6 warns us not to be deceived by *“empty (or, vain, worthless) words.”* Because the world loves its immorality, it seeks to justify and excuse itself with the rationalization that you cannot expect men to abstain from immorality; it is just natural for them to do so. The Roman philosopher, Cicero, maintained, “He that blames young men for their illicit love affairs does what is repugnant to the customs and concessions of our ancestors, for when was this not done? When was it not permitted?” Note that in this statement Cicero is actually condemning those who would protest against immorality and is justifying the practice of fornication.

In contrast to Cicero, consider this statement made by a police officer who works with youth in Sheboygan, Wisconsin: “Saying that kids are going to do it [commit acts of immorality] anyway is ridiculous. We’re human beings. We have control over what we do. Kids are going to do what we expect. And we should expect them to be abstinent. Animals do it anyway; humans don’t.” (The Sheboygan Press, 8/14/96) As human beings, men and women created in the image of God, we have a moral ability and a moral responsibility. It is not to the animals that God gives the commandment to practice moral purity, but to us, precisely because we are made in His image and have an accountability to Him.

Verse 6b goes on to warn that because of these things *“the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”* There is a present, temporal form of God’s wrath and judgment against moral impurity, expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:26-27,

*God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. **Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.** (Rom. 1:26-27)*

This present, temporal form of God’s wrath and judgment may take the form of sexually transmitted diseases, the worst of which is AIDS, as well as emotional and psychological effects that can be devastating. A Sheboygan, Wisconsin, police officer states that in the 12 years he has worked with teens some of the worst cases of emotional and physical trauma he has seen were the result of sexual relationships. “Guilt and low self-esteem filter into other areas of their lives, rendering them non-functional. Some of them have seriously contemplated suicide.” (The Sheboygan Press, 8/14/96) A girl who is a high school senior says, “there are too many risks. These days sex could mean death. I have too much I want to do with my life to throw it away like that.” A boy who is a high school

sophomore says, “Kids think drugs, alcohol and sex can free them from their problems, but they don’t. They only make them worse.”

Then, too, there is the future and eternal form of God’s judgment: *“But the cowardly and the unfaith and the detestable and murderers and the sexually immoral and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars—their place shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”* (Rev. 21:8.)

So then, exhorts the Word of God, *“do not be a participant with them [in their sins.]”* Do not become involved in their immoral conduct and lifestyle, so that you will not join them when they receive the consequence and punishment for their conduct. Employing ancient Babylon as the symbol of any and all immoral and decadent societies, the Lord Jesus implores His people, *“Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; ⁵for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes”* (Rev. 18:4-5.)

III. Practice Moral Purity, ...because You are a Child of the Light (5:8-14)

Verse 8 indicates that because of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ we belong to the light: *“Previously, you were [part of the] darkness, but now you [belong to the] light in the Lord.”* As Christians, we now have a living connection with the life of truth and purity that is found in Jesus.

Therefore, we are to *“walk [or, live,] as children of light.”* By the grace of God, we are to live day by day the new and pure life that we share with Jesus.

Furthermore, we are not to *“participate in the unfruitful works of darkness”* (vs. 11.) We are not to associate with people who are committed to immorality; we are not to associate with friends when they indulge in immoral conduct. Let us bear in mind the warning of James 4:4, *“You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”* (Jas. 4:4.)

According to verse 10, as we walk with the Lord—living His lifestyle of moral purity, as opposed to the world’s lifestyle of immorality and impurity—we will come to discover by personal experience that the Lord’s lifestyle is the good life; note, too, Romans 12:1-2,

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. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Conclusion

In a society where God's good gift of sex is abused and where sex outside of marriage is becoming the accepted way of life, what does the Lord say to us as Christian people?

His message to us as presented in this passage of Scripture can be summed up in the words, "Practice Moral Purity." Practice moral purity in word and in deed. Practice moral purity in order to avoid God's righteous judgment. Practice moral purity because in Christ you have become a "child of the light" and no longer belong to the darkness.

In reliance on His grace, let us heed our heavenly Father's commandment, and, indeed, practice moral purity.