

A New Covenant:
Biblical Singleness, Marriage, Divorce, and Sexual Purity
Presentation 7: Sexual Purity

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick
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We are living in the last days.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:1-5 KJV).

This text describes those who, in the last days, are servers—actually, slaves—of self. They are without self-control. They are unsafe. They are religious; they have a form of godliness, but only a form. All of us have been on that road. But for the grace of God, we would end there, ruined for heaven and ruined for earth.

There is a way that seems right to a man, a sin that does not seem really quite so bad, a moral discrepancy that we justify in our eyes. But even one wrong trait of character, just one sinful desire, persistently indulged, in time will neutralize all the power of the gospel. It will become our god.

We are all choosing whom we will serve. All of our decisions either embrace or oppose God's values. Our response to temptations sets a trend line. We are remaking ourselves all the time. The computer programmer's dictum holds true for our characters: GIGO (Garbage In, Garbage Out), or GIGO (Goodness In, Goodness Out). Jesus said, "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit" (Luke 6:43. Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are from the English Standard Version). Our choice in the moment is always between other-serving and self serving.

There is the foundation for all that we shall now say. Our topic is sexual purity. We are not opposed to human sexuality which God has designed and written into the fabric of us, but its

misuse. Our focus is on how we can make better decisions, and on Jesus as our model who chose rest in God rather than escape.

Adultery in the Heart

The phenomenon we look at today is exactly opposite biblical singleness.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:7, 28).

Is Jesus calling men to something higher than to what He had called them to before the New Testament?

There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? (Genesis 39:9 KJV).

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? (Job 31:1).

You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress (Psalm 17:3).

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you (Psalm 119:11).

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank (Daniel 1:8).

These statements remind us that believers in God have long emphasized the practice of self-control. One application of self-control is in the area of sexual desire. The methods seen here are (1) Hatred of sin; (2) The exercise of self-control in terms of what one sees; (3) The exercise of the will in choosing otherwise than inclination; (4) Preoccupation of the heart with God's values. Put another way, these texts tell of absorption in God's values and action upon them.

But this is exactly where we tend to be weakest! We are not hearing strong messages or reading strong books or filling our hearts with God's Word as we ought. So, to start with, we are flimsy in our understanding of and commitment to God's values. If we do not know what those values are, we will be oblivious about how to live them in our daily choices.

At the end of the day, there are matters which manifest themselves in our outward acts, and ones which remain secret, known only to God and to ourselves. Notice: In the Bible, what is the penalty for adultery manifested in outward acts? Death (Deuteronomy 22:22). But what is the penalty for adultery manifested in inward acts? No man is able to read the heart. First Timothy 5:24 tells the tale:

The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later.

Some deeds are neither understood by other humans nor are their consequences outwardly evident in this life. Their day will come in the judgment. Adultery in the heart as only an inward manifestation, involves no externally visible or knowable violation of the marriage covenant. Still sin, it is sin that God, the only One who can read our minds, will address. The church is made of people and people cannot read the minds of other people. Thus we may not judge the inward thoughts of members.

Decision-making Behavior and Self-service

None of us want to think that our deeds in the area of sexuality could be dominated by self-serving behavior. But ponder two ways in which this happens:

- (1) direct gross pleasure-seeking
- (2) escape

We like to think of ourselves as civilized, advanced, beyond the savagery of the animals. We are above the merely instinctive, our motivations are higher than those of crickets. I am not so sure. The culture around us relentlessly prods us to make desire for pleasure our dominant motivator.

How people make decisions is not complicated. Remember three things.

First, all human action is purposeful behavior. We have reasons why we do things. They may be good reasons or poor, but we embrace specific motivations.

Second, every person is continuously engaged in the attempt to exchange a less satisfactory state of affairs for a more satisfactory one. Man chooses what he values most highly. Objects and principles less important to him are lower on his scale of valued things. That which is less desired is sought only after energy has been spent to obtain that which is more desired, or, if more valued things are deemed to be unattainable. Faced with an either/or choice between a meal composed of carrots or cinnamon rolls, one chooses the carrots because he values his physical health more highly, or, the momentary pleasure of the cinnamon rolls. Everyone has a scale of values.

Third, we prefer to achieve our goal in the shortest possible time. Life is lived with reference to time perspective. Our thinking (hence, our actions) are primarily generated out of looking at our life from a short-term or long-term timeframe.

So, all actions are purposeful; every person has a scale of values and expends energy to obtain the things he values most; we prefer to achieve our goal in the shortest possible time. If we are other-serving, then how we treat others and the example that we set for others by our

behavior guide our goals and the means we use to achieve those goals. If we are self-serving, then self-serving principles will be operative in achieving the goal of serving self.

Direct Gross Pleasure-seeking

Few want to admit that our primary motivator could be mere pleasure-seeking. In often subtle ways, Satan tempts us to excess. We develop that pattern, until, although we would vehemently deny it, underneath our pretty words and careful reasons we have actually embraced desire as our highest law. Pleasure has become our chief value, the main thing we live for.

God wired our race so that in its legitimate setting—biblical marriage—we might experience the privilege of sexual pleasure. But we are manifesting rebellion toward Him when we place the experience of physical pleasure above the seeking of God’s ways (righteousness). Jesus said to seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God, and that with that He would give us all other things needful to us (Matthew 6:33; 2 Peter 1:3, 4). But in practice, many hold the operative attitude that they will take their pleasures wherever they wish to find them, and if they worship God, they will do so on their own terms. Many are far advanced in the wide road to final destruction (Matthew 7:13, 14).

You have read the Bible. You know the warnings.

She who is self-indulgent [KJV, “liveth in pleasure”] is dead even while she lives (1 Timothy 5:6).

[Moses chose] rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25).

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day (1 Corinthians 10:8).

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority (2 Peter 2:9, 10).

Some engage in sexual immorality because they like how it feels in the moment, and for no higher reason. But God can help us. He can change even this for us, if we choose to accept His help for change.

How Escape Serves Self

Another reason that people engage in sexual immorality is in order to escape. Samson offers an example of escape to serve self. In his case, behavior was outwardly manifest, but we can draw lessons for our own situation even if our escape is inward, in the imagination.

Samson's life experience is outlined in Judges 13-16. God gave special dietary instructions to his parents, and he likely was raised in careful compliance. Nevertheless, a dangerous trend begins when Samson sees a Philistine woman whom he finds especially attractive. He asks his parents to arrange the marriage. When they protest, he insists, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes" (Judges 14:3). The marriage goes awry, and mayhem follows. But at last Samson meets Delilah (Judges 16:4), and a destructive and sexually immoral relationship ensues.

The leaders of the Philistines urge Delilah (whose name means to weaken, consume, impoverish) to seduce Samson and learn from him how he can be overpowered. She urges him, "Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you" (Judges 16:6). She asks this question repeatedly (vv. 10, 13, 15, 16). In response,

repeatedly he lies to her. Several attempts are made to capture him, but each time he subdues his attackers (vv. 9, 12, 14).

Samson was no simpleton. He was a composer of thoughtful riddles, able to develop persuasive stories and to understand when third parties were interfering with his prostitutes and lovers. He must have understood Delilah's treachery from the very beginning. But he stayed with her. He saw her as "right" in his eyes. Her question asking how he might be subdued gave away the fact that she was a dangerous person. But he kept going back to her. And every time that he went back, she pled for the answer. By his own choice he persisted in a self-destructive relationship, until so vexed with her badgering, he gave in and told her everything (Judges 16:17).

If we persist in self-destructive behavior, eventually we will reap what we have sown (Galatians 6:7). Samson persisted, and was at last taken prisoner. Then the Philistines gouged out his eyes (vv. 20, 21). Samson's was escapist behavior. He lived in the world of sense. That is, he lived in the world but what he lived for was the escape into fantasy and sensation. Eyes fed imagination and in the end he paid for his escape by the loss of his eyes and even his life.

The Eye as Portal

Our eyes get us into trouble not because in themselves they are a liability, but because we let them serve as the starting point for our misuse of our imagination. The Bible shows tells how misuse leads to sin.

King David was lounging around his palace. Previously he had noticed the unimpaired view of the bathing hole. One day he is lingering at the window and sees Bathsheba bathing from

there. Eve also managed to venture to the one place in the garden of Eden where she could see the forbidden fruit of the tree. Unfortunately, she took her eyes.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6).

Nebuchadnezzar looks out onto Babylon and is moved to praise himself (Daniel 4:30). These examples demonstrate why God put our heads on a swivel. It was for the very purpose of aiding us in averting our eyes. If we do not master them, we will become enmeshed in an unreality of our own making, and at the last, destroyed.

Escaping Bad Feelings About Ourselves

These are more obvious ways in which we escape, but also the less obvious. Consider this experiment.

After receiving a bad evaluation, people were quicker to leave a room in which they faced a large mirror than after a good evaluation. Other people, receiving the same bad evaluation, but in a room without a mirror, did not show the same hurry to leave—it was the combination of the mirror and the bad evaluation that people wanted to escape (Roy F. Baumeister, *Escaping the Self*, p. 24).

In another test, a group of people were asked how much they would pay for a certain water bottle, and the average answer was \$2.50. Another group was first shown a video that left its viewers saddened. After viewing it they were asked how much they would pay for the same water bottle. The average answer was \$10.00. Does acquisition serve as a means by which we try to cause ourselves to feel better? The imagination seems able to acquire desired riches in a moment.

Baumeister points out that

When misfortunes or setbacks occur, people can either blame external factors and exonerate themselves, or take responsibility and blame themselves. Escapist motivations arise mainly among people who follow the latter path (Baumeister, pp. 28, 29).

We put a great deal of energy into being “good” people. When we feel that we have failed, the pressure can be enormous. Escaping it is one apparent means of dealing with it. But exactly how does escape serve self?

It is love, not hate, that underlies self-defeating behavior. Our love of self is so great that it becomes intolerable to let ourselves be seen in a bad light. When events do cast self in a bad light, the first impulse is to turn the light off—that is, to escape from an awareness of self (Baumeister, p. 56).

It is also helpful to realize that

When a person becomes addicted, it is not to a chemical but to an experience. Anything that a person finds sufficiently consuming and that seems to remedy deficiencies in the person’s life can serve as an addiction. The addictive potential of a substance or other involvement lies primarily in the meaning it has for that person. A person is vulnerable to addiction when that person feels a lack of satisfaction in life, an absence of intimacy or strong connections to other people, a lack of self-confidence or compelling interests, or a loss of hope (Stanton Peele, *The Truth About Addiction and Recovery*, p. 42).

The ‘hook’ of the addiction—the thing that keeps people coming back to it—is that it gives people feelings and gratifying sensations that they are not able to get in other ways. It may block out sensations of pain, uncertainty, or discomfort. It may create powerfully distracting sensations that focus and absorb attention (Peele, p. 43).

Another way to think of these two modes of self-service, is that one is more direct, the other, less. One directly embraces pleasure as the highest value, the other may use pornography and sexual fantasy as an escape from responsibility—an indirect means of serving self.

Should we be surprised if we discover that pleasure and escape are among our chief values? We have been brought into existence in a culture that fully endorses escape. It may be the

poison of our times, but we are to stand as rebels against it. We are disciples of Christ, not citizens of here. We seek a better country, a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16).

The Pleasure of a Clean Conscience

As men and women seeking God, we have a different value system. We place the value of a clear conscience above the value of a passing moment of physical pleasure. Paul knew its value and always sought to have a clear conscience before God and man (Acts 24:16). Many without the privilege of the Scriptures still listen to the voice of conscience (Romans 2:15). Paul made living in harmony with one's conscience a keynote of his ministry to others (2 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19; 3:9).

In Hebrews we find this.

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14).

And church is where our experience with Jesus and with each other comes together:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:19-25).

We've all served our flesh. The question is, is that still satisfying five minutes later? But to endure temptation, to experience the subduing of our baser impulses, is *very* satisfying.

Having a clear conscience this moment and also five minutes from now, brings great pleasure. If we actively seek divine aid so that our very sources of pleasure are changed, we will have God's help for overcoming improper sexual desire.

When do people begin to recover from escapist behavior? When they realize that what they used to think this behavior did for them was actually very little, and at the same time they are creating a new set of beliefs that sexual purity, of itself, is a desirable and rewarding state. We need to process these questions. What are my highest values? Who am I? What makes me me? What does my life stand for? Am I a mouse or a man?

Jesus Our Model

Surely Jesus was the most contented man in history. He walked closely with God. He chose rest rather than escape. We must learn to choose rest rather than escape. Recall our three items on decision-making: (1) all action is meaningful; (2) we seek to exchange a less satisfactory situation for a more satisfactory one; (3) we prefer to achieve our goals sooner rather than later. Where was Jesus on these?

Certainly, Jesus demonstrated His agreement that all action is meaningful. He encouraged people to choose the right and to manifest that choice in concrete acts. Then there was Jesus' ministry, itself a demonstration of His determination to replace a less satisfactory state of affairs with a more satisfactory one. He died on the cross to bring that about. Jesus, like all of us, preferred to obtain His goals immediately, but understood that if He would be successful, He must take the longer course.

He wished to engage more directly in His Father's work earlier, but submitted to the counsel of His parents (Luke 2:41-52). In the desert temptations He resisted Satan's offer to give

Him the kingdoms of the world without His having to go to the cross (Matthew 4:8-10; Luke 4:58). He understood that His mission would bring judgment, and would have preferred that it was already accomplished (Luke 12:49). In the garden of Gethsemane, He trembled at the possibility of abandoning His journey to the cross, but chose to submit Himself to the will of His Father (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44; Mark 14:35, 36, 39; Luke 22:42).

Jesus led a busy life yet He never chose escape. He often so spent Himself in serving others that He slept but little, and would withdraw to solitary places to strengthen His connection with His Father. These were never incidents of escape. He cleared away distractions by placing Himself in settings where He could deepen His spiritual connection. At such times He avoided distractors. Mark 1:35 records one such occasion:

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Notice, He rose very early. It was still dark. The time chosen was morning. He had just had some sleep and could approach His Father with a clear mind. He went out; He did not remain where His disciples might easily find Him. He found a location where only Himself and His guardian angels would join Him. There, He prayed. We find the same in Matthew 14:13 where He seeks solitude in a boat, and then ten verses later, goes up into the hills, apart from others, and there prays. He also urged that His disciples rest (Mark 6:31).

When Jesus sought time apart, He sought communion with His father. When we seek time apart, we often reposition ourselves not to a place away from noise, but to one where it is especially present, where it is more difficult to concentrate, to pray, to commune with God. This is a mistake. The culture we find ourselves enmeshed in today is full of beeping, bleeping, chattering, twittering, buzzing, and humming. We cannot bear silence; we blot out the silence

with noise of some kind. We are non-contemplative people. We feel that we pay good money to other people to be contemplative for us. We would prefer to get it precut, predigested, pre-sifted.

This might work for fast food but it will not grow stable Christian persons. We need to change our approach, raise the value in ourselves of solitary time with God and lower other things in our scale of values. Then, so much as possible, we need to deactivate our sources of distraction and talk—really talk—with God. Jesus showed the way to self control, to sexual purity.

Conclusion

This is good news, for the goal of sexual purity is the goal also of self-control. Unless we learn how to cooperate with God's help for the control of our thoughts, we will default into self-serving behavior. Whether merely the gross enjoyment of pleasure for its own sake, or in the form of escape, we will enter into our own trap, our own velvet cage. To control our imagination, we must control our eyes. We are like everyone else; we make decisions the same way as everyone else. But as Christians, Jesus is our Model. He always engaged in reality, never escaped it. We need to seek God. We need to reevaluate our values. We need to replace the pleasure of sensation as an ultimate value, with the pleasure of a clear conscience. Salvation is indeed a gift, but an experience with Jesus will cost us something.

Biographical note: Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.