

Session 7

Role of Men in the Church

Man as Sexually Pure - Uriah

(II Samuel 11; I Corinthians 6:12-20; 7:1)

“How could I go to my house to eat and drink and live with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing.” II Samuel 11:11

“It is God’s will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body.” I Corinthians 4:3

- I. The challenge to men in our society to be sexually pure.
 - A. Men, especially young men, have always greatly valued “having sex”, not only for the physical pleasure but also because they think it proves that they are men.
 - B. The control of the sexual drive has been an ambivalent goal for men in most societies throughout history, in contrast to the expectation that women should be sexually pure (the double standard). In the United States, this double standard may derive from two competing expectations.
 1. One expectation is that manliness is characterized by reserve and self-control (such as General Robert E. Lee).
 2. Another expectation is that manliness is characterized by the natural man, passionate and self-reliant (Natty Bumppo in the *Leatherstocking Tales*).
 - C. In recent years, the sexual drive and fulfillment has reached new heights of importance in our society for men (and increasingly for women).
 1. Hollywood movies glorify the violent and sexually active man (James Bond).
 2. Male sexual expression to some almost becomes a religion (D.H. Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*)
 - D. We now, as a society, expect young men to “experiment” sexually (and we are increasingly expecting young women to do the same). Our message from college administrators to students is to practice safe sex and to avoid “date rape”, not premarital sex.
 - E. Pornography is easily accessible and the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable has become blurred (most persons do not think twice about viewing an “R” rated movie, quite a change from the concern about one sentence in *Gone with the Wind*).
 - F. The message of abstinence (prior to marriage and as a means of protecting against disease) is being taught but scarcely being heard in society as a whole. Rather, the risk of pregnancy or disease often heightens the thrill of sexual intercourse.

- II. The challenge to men in the church to be sexually pure.
 - A. Churches clearly teach sexual purity and abstinence from sexual intercourse prior to marriage.
 - B. Gatherings, such as Promise Keepers, encourage men to pledge sexual abstinence outside of the marriage relationship.
 - C. Yet the effectiveness of these teachings and encouragements may be limited.
 - D. In the past, churches supported these teachings by clear boundaries which reduced (but which did not stop) premarital sexual relations. These boundaries were not always clear cut (bundling among New England Puritans). They included:
 - 1. Dress codes.
 - 2. Separate activities for boys and girls which limited the interaction between the sexes.
 - 3. Clear and prescribed courting relationships.
 - 4. The absence of methods for birth control (and later teachings against birth control).
 - 5. The bride dressed in the “white garment of purity” (a good example of the double standard).
 - 6. Frequent teachings about the dangers of “lust” and descriptions of the fearful consequences of illicit sex.
 - 7. The exalted value placed upon celibacy.
 - E. For many reasons, these boundaries have all but disappeared from our churches.
 - 1. The church no longer has the influence in society it once had, so the restrictions encouraged by the church are not supported by society.
 - 2. The church does not want to appear withdrawn, puritanical or just plain odd in the eyes of society. We want to be relevant.
 - 3. The church now emphasizes more “individual responsibility” rather than group control over the behavior of its members.
 - 4. The church recognizes that its members are far from perfect and therefore is not willing to place a “scarlet” letter upon persons who become sexually impure.
 - 5. The church is trying to reach a lost world and realizes that to open its doors to the lost means opening its doors to people who do not change their worldly behaviors overnight.
 - 6. The church now tends to emphasize a message of grace rather than a message of condemnation.
 - F. The church has also lost much of its moral authority in society as a whole (though this may appear at times to be changing). The church has also lost much of its moral authority over its members (we are just not inclined to tell our members how to live their lives). This observation does *not* mean the church is less moral (immorality has plagued the church since its beginnings and we may even be more moral as a church today than at times in the past).
 - G. Because of the above, the church has little leverage when teaching sexual purity (at least in the eyes of the world).

III. Uriah and sexual purity.

- A. Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba, was a soldier in King David's army (II Samuel 11).
 - 1. David lusted after Bathsheba, slept with her, and she became pregnant. In order to cover his sin, David invited Uriah to return from the battle front and encouraged him to spend the night with Bathsheba.
 - 2. Uriah refused. "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing." (v. 11)
 - 3. David sent Uriah back to the battle front and instructed his general, Joab, to place Uriah in a position where he would be killed.
- B. We cannot know for certain the motives of Uriah (he may have gained a hint of the unfaithfulness of Bathsheba), but he followed a known taboo that, when in the midst of a battle, one does not engage in sexual intercourse. Battle requires full self-control and zeal for the one goal of victory.
- C. Uriah may also have felt a loyalty to his colleagues in the field (why should he benefit when they could not).
- D. Paul appeals to a similar propensity to "put the battle for Christ first" in I Corinthians 7:1. "It is good for a man not to marry..."
 - 1. Paul was not anti-family.
 - 2. Paul did not require this restriction of the Corinthian Christians (v. 2).
 - 3. Paul believed the marriage relationship to be a sacred one (Ephesians 5).
 - 4. Rather, Paul viewed the Christian pilgrimage as a difficult walk requiring as much attention as possible to the central cause.
 - a. If the Christian man could rid himself of the "distraction" of marriage and sexual intercourse (celibacy), then that was all the better.
 - b. If the Christian man could not, then he should marry and, so he would not be distracted, Paul instructs each partner "Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time." (I Corinthians 7:5)
 - 5. Underlying each of these instructions is an absolute imperative for the man (and woman) to remain sexually pure in whatever state he finds himself.
 - a. "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." (I Corinthians 6:18, 19)
 - b. "It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body." (I Thessalonians 4:3)
 - 6. We must remember that Paul lived in a society whose sexual mores were as loose (perhaps even more loose) than our own. These instructions, especially to the Corinthians, must have sounded especially harsh.

7. Paul recognized the strong sexual temptations set before the Corinthian Christians. He also recognized the especially dangerous erosion of our walk with God if we lapse into sexual immorality.
- E. The bottom line is that sexual sin committed by a man can be forgiven. God's grace can cover all sins. The church must accept the sexual sinner back into its fold just as it does any other type of sinner. Nevertheless, those men who engage in sexual sin, those who are sexually impure, have placed themselves in especial danger because they do not recognize the seriousness of the sin in terms of both what it does to God's creation (our bodies) and to our focus upon doing the will of God (our duty as Christians).

IV. Steps toward keeping men sexually pure.

- A. The problem of sexual purity among men must be kept on the front burner of the congregation. Remember that this was one of Paul's most frequent themes (Romans 1:24; I Corinthians 5:1, 6:18, Ephesians 4:19; etc.).
1. Sexual purity should be emphasized from our pulpits and in our classes.
 2. Sexual purity should be a topic of conversation among our men.
 3. The ever constant temptation to sexual sins in our society should be recognized and emphasized.
- B. The congregation must recognize that the problem of sexual purity is more a problem for some men than others (just as the problem of greed or obesity may be more difficult for some than others). Sexual problems are more a problem at certain times than others. Sexual problems vary in type from one man to another. In other words, the problem I have may not be the problem experienced by my brother.
1. Sexual sins must not be singled out as "unforgivable sins".
 2. Sexual purity must be recognized as something which can be achieved in the here and now, despite our past behaviors.
 3. Some behaviors, which may be tempting to some men, will not be tempting to others (for example, some men may be strongly attracted to the clothes of women).
 4. Some men may be attracted to men.
- C. Sexual impurity, regardless of its characteristics, must be recognized as a particularly dangerous and destructive problem when it does arise.
1. We almost invariably hurt others when we are sexually impure. (Matthew 5:27, 28)
 2. We hurt our bodies when we are sexually impure. (I Corinthians 6:18)
 3. We follow a path that is potentially never ending when we are sexually impure. (The road is wide which leads to destruction [Matthew 7:13]).
- D. If we err, we must err on the side of safety in the area of sexual temptations.
1. We should reconsider the TV shows, movies and books which we use to entertain ourselves.
 2. If surfing the web is a particular temptation to pornography for a man, then perhaps he should not surf the web at all (just as the alcoholic really cannot drink even one drink and hope to remain sober).

- E. We should be considerate of the weaknesses of all our brothers. (Romans 14:7) If a brother has a problem with sexual temptation, be considerate of that brother and don't expose him to the temptation. For example, even a slightly off color joke may be a problem to that brother. A puritanical attitude toward sex will not control (and may actually encourage) sexual impurity. Yet a very open attitude may have an equally damaging effect. Each case is different.
 - F. We should recognize the unique potential of the celibate life (and therefore not necessarily encourage every man to get married).
 - G. We should not accuse women as the cause of our problems with sexual purity. Of course, women may say things, dress in certain ways, etc. which encourage sexual sins. Nevertheless, keeping sexually pure is the responsibility of the man (we do not read of Paul or Jesus stating that our problems with sexual impurity are outside ourselves).
 - H. Perhaps men at times (with the consent of their wives) should consider a period of abstinence (a sexual fast). (I Corinthians 7:5)
 - 1. Sexual abstinence had been abused in Corinth. Married men and women may have been separated for long periods of time (perhaps indefinitely) in some show of objection to the widespread pagan sexual activities.
 - 2. Paul makes it clear that, if abstinence is considered, it should:
 - a. Be by mutual consent (not forced externally as did the Shakers).
 - b. Be only for a season (not indefinitely).
 - c. The goal should be definite (such as a season for prayer). Paul and Peter appear to differ on the "means to an end" regarding prayer.
 - (1) Paul suggests sexual abstinence as a means of facilitating prayer.
 - (2) Peter implores men to treat their wives with respect in order to facilitate prayer (I Peter 3:7).
 - (3) But these passages don't truly conflict.
 - 3. We should not dismiss the idea that short periods of sexual abstinence might facilitate our spiritual lives. Yet there is much room for abuse of this practice (perhaps as there might be room for abuse of fasting).
- V. The role of the church in facilitating sexual purity.
- A. The church must not hesitate to teach, as did Jesus, Paul, and others regarding the importance of sexual purity among men and the great temptation presented to sin sexually in our society.
 - B. Of equal importance, the church must teach a healthy respect for the body, recognizing its needs and recognizing the need to keep the body under control. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body." (I Corinthians 6:20)