

## **DEVOTED TO CHRIST: SINGLENES THAT GLORIFIES GOD**

### *Devoting Your Body to the Lord II: Dealing with Sexual Brokenness*

#### **Introduction**

Sex is everywhere. You see it in the media, hear about it on campus, talk about it with your friends. In a culture saturated with sex, we can't help but notice. As followers of Christ, we may know what the Bible says about sexual immorality, but not be sure how to reconcile that with our own sexual desires and pressures from the world around us. Tonight, we're going to talk about what it looks like to devote our bodies to the Lord when dealing with sexual brokenness. My hope for you is that you'll experience God's forgiveness for your sexual past and victory for your sexual future. First Thessalonians 4 urges us to live a holy life:

*It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. (v 3-7)*

In this passage, we're told to avoid sexual immorality, to learn to control our bodies, and that we shouldn't wrong or take advantage of our brothers. What if you've already failed in those areas?

#### **YOU ARE NOT YOUR SEXUAL PAST**

Last week, Tim taught about what our bodies are for. Sex was given to reinforce our identity in Christ, which makes sexual immorality wrong because it lies about who you truly are. What if you've made mistakes in the past that are not honoring to the Lord? The consequences of our sexual behavior can be serious. The good news is that, on the cross, Jesus forgave your sins and cleansed you from all sins you have committed. 1 John 1:9 tells us that, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. What a great promise for us to hold on to. Nothing that we've done in the past is so bad that God cannot redeem it.

Tim also told us that we are not our sexual history. If you've been the victim of sexual abuse, either as a child or as a teen or college student, be certain that you are not responsible for the sins of others against you. You may have chosen to be in the situation where you were abused, but you are not responsible for your abusers actions. Why are we mentioning abuse when talking about our sexual *sin*? Though you didn't choose to be abused, the effects of the abuse have lasting effects on your sexuality. Maybe you feel used or rejected or insignificant as a result of your abuse. This is not what you are! You are God's chosen one, his treasured possession. (Deut 7:6) Be sure of your identity in Christ, so that you can live devoted to Him. Your identity must be marked by what Christ has done for you and no longer by what has been done to you. Jesus not only forgave your sins and cleansed you from all sins *you* have committed, but he also forgives and cleanses those that have been committed *against* you.

Let's talk about sexual sins you may have committed. Remember, your sexual past does not define who you are. Just because you've lost your virginity does not mean you should continue having sex. We are free from the sins of our past because we've been washed, sanctified, and justified in Christ. (1 Cor 6:11) Our identity must be marked only by what Christ has done *for* us and no longer by what has been done *by* us. You may feel shame or regret because of your past. We feel shame because our behavior was dishonoring to God. While it's important to recognize your shame, your shame should not last. You can have freedom from shame because we have been washed clean by the blood of Christ. We feel regret because we know that the Bible tells us to flee from sexual immorality. (1 Cor. 6:18) We must confess our sexual mistakes and turn from them. The passage from 1 Thessalonians also says that each of us should *learn* to control our bodies, which means there is hope for those of us who think we can't control our bodies. Though the pursuit of sexual purity is a battle (which is true even within marriage!), the Lord has given us everything we need to be victorious.

Maybe you are dealing with disappointment that your boyfriend is not a virgin or has an extensive sexual past. Or maybe you are concerned that, though you have maintained sexual purity, your future husband has not. Remember that promise from 1 John – God will forgive our sins (and the sins of others) and *purify* us from unrighteousness. Because of the grace God has poured on us, we are able to extend grace to others. We're told to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. (Col 3:13) This works both ways. Maybe you are the one who has lost your virginity while your boyfriend has not. Cling to the Cross for forgiveness for your actions and for the ability to extend forgiveness to the man who has not maintained sexual purity before marriage.

## **SEEK GODLINESS, NOT WORLDLINESS**

Paul warns the Thessalonians that, regarding their sexual purity, no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him (v. 6). This is important for us as women to keep in mind as we pursue purity. Choosing godliness over worldliness will help us in our pursuit. To know how to do this, we must understand what each of those terms means. What is godliness? Though some may see godliness as an exhaustive list of behaviors we should avoid, its motivation is different than legalism. We pursue godliness by conforming to what Scripture says and becoming more like Jesus. What, then, is worldliness? Worldliness is accepting values and practices of the nice, but unbelieving, society around us without discerning whether or not those values and practices are biblical.<sup>1</sup> It's when our love for the things of this world become more important than our love for the things of God.

### ***Defrauding our Brothers (and Sisters)***

One of the ways we see women waver between worldliness and godliness is in the way we dress. Godliness can be seen in our modesty, which is found when we present ourselves, both in behavior and appearance, in a way that avoids indecency. Worldliness is revealed when we present ourselves in a way that is immodest. The way we dress is important.

C.J. Mahaney explains that modesty is a humble desire to serve others, particularly men, by not promoting or provoking sensuality. Ladies, we can do much to help encourage our brothers

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007. 166.

to remain morally pure, but can also do much to cause a man to stumble. Unfortunately, most women fail to see the way their immodesty affects the men around us. Women can defraud men with immodest dress, flirtatious behavior, or flattering words. Listen to this testimony from a male college student:

*The thing that women do not seem to fully grasp is that the temptation toward lust does not stop. It is continual. It is aggressive. And it does all it can to lead men down to death. And women have a choice to help or deter the goal and purpose of lust. Sometimes when I see a girl provocatively dressed, I'll say to myself, "She probably doesn't even know that 101 guys are going to devour her in their minds today. But then again, maybe she does." To be honest, I don't know the truth, the truth of why she chooses to dress the way she does, the way she chooses to walk, the way she chooses to act. I don't know because I've never sat down with a girl and asked why. All I need to know is that the way she presents herself to the world is bait for my sinful mind to latch onto and I need to avoid it at all costs.<sup>2</sup>*

Are you aware of the effect your appearance and behavior has on the men around you?

Our modesty is not just for our brothers in Christ; it's for our sisters as well. Whether we intend to or not, the way we dress sets an example for the women around us. When we wear something that's too tight, or too short, or too low-cut, we tell other women that this is an appropriate way to dress and gives them "permission" to do the same. This applies to both the younger women in our lives who look up to us and also to our peers.

Just as our sexual mistakes can lie about our union with Christ, the way we dress can give a false picture of who we are in Christ. The woman who loves the Savior avoids immodesty because she doesn't want to distract from or reflect poorly on the gospel. As women, we can either detract from the gospel by dressing immodestly or we can enhance the gospel mission by dressing in a way that reflects the transforming power of the gospel at work in us.<sup>3</sup> How does the way you dress reflect on the gospel?

### ***Pornography***

In addition to the way we dress, we should be striving for purity in our thoughts as well. Proverbs 15:26 tells us that *the LORD detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him*. Paul tells us that whatever is pure, to think about such things. (Phil 4:8) We won't spend much time on the topic of pornography, as Tim will spend some time addressing it next week. In a discussion of sexual brokenness, it is important that we at least mention pornography. You may be wondering why we need to address porn in a group of women. Though it's typically a struggle more common to men, women do struggle with graphic pornography as well, and that is becoming a more common trend.

Pornography is anything that seeks to satisfy a desire for sex or love artificially. Pornography takes sex, which is a good gift from God, and distorts it by providing an unrealistic

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<sup>2</sup> C.J. Mahaney, *Wordliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008. 117-138.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Free to Be Modest*. <http://www.therebelution.com/blog/2007/02/nancy-leigh-demoss-free-to-be-modest/>

view of sex. While men are aroused visually, women are often more wired to feelings of personal intimacy and emotional closeness as cues for sexual arousal. Men do pornography. Women do romance.<sup>4</sup> Knowing that, have you ever thought about the effects of emotional porn? Have you ever heard that term? For many women, chick-flicks and romance novels can be harmful, just as pornography is for men. Like pornography, chick-flicks take a good gift from God (romance, relational intimacy) that women are created to desire, and distort it by presenting as normal an unbiblical and unrealistic picture of men, love, and marriage. And just like men who buy into the lies of pornography, women who believe that men should always be like what they see on the screen will be sinfully dissatisfied with God's good gift to them.<sup>5</sup>

Have you seen this before? A friend of yours starts dating a new guy. At first things are great, but after a while, he's not living up to her expectations. Where did these expectations come from? Is she looking for a man who is characterized by his love for the Lord or is she looking for a man who resembles the main character in the most recent romantic comedy you've seen? If our expectations are determined by worldly things, we should be prepared to be disappointed. Everything we are exposed to shapes us. If we feed ourselves with chick-flicks and romance novels, and not with the Word of God, guess what we'll start to look more like. Paul reminds us that in Christ "everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything. (1 Cor 6:12) These things may seem harmless, but could cause us to fulfill our desires with worldly romance instead of with Christ.

### ***Using sex for power and manipulation***

At an early age, women learn that there is power in our sexuality. You see it on TV and in the movies all the time: Women who are wearing revealing clothing can talk their way out of speeding tickets, get into the best club, or make men do just about anything she wants. Some women enjoy the sense of power and control over another person's sexual response. Maybe you have experienced the power that comes from your sexuality. The clothes you wear and the way you behave can be used to manipulate men. Are you particularly flirtatious? Do you lean in close or touch his arm? Why do we do this? Is it because you are trying to get the attention and affections of a man and think this is the best way to do so? If so, without realizing it, you are no longer in the pursuit of love, but for the temporary power you get from the response of those around you.

Think about it this way: Women are tempted by the power lust promises *to attract other people's husbands*. That may sound absurd, but think about it. We might say we don't want that kind of attention from married men, but if we want lots of interest from many single men, we actually want to lure men who probably will be other women's husbands in the future.<sup>6</sup> It's important that we are aware of the long-term effects of our behavior now.

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<sup>4</sup>David Powlison, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*. Edited by John Piper & Justin Taylor. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Beth Spraul, *You've Got Lies: Chick Flicks and the World's Approach to Men and Marriage*.

[http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/youve\\_got\\_lies.pdf](http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/youve_got_lies.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn McCulley, *Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?* Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004. 165.

Our bodies are not to be used for power or manipulation. Jesus did not use His power for personal gain. If he did not use his power for gain, we should not either. Instead, let's seek to serve one another through a humble modesty. It's important that we live in a way that doesn't defraud our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## **DEVOTING OUR BODIES TO CHRIST**

Now that we've looked at some areas where we may be experiencing sexual brokenness, let's talk about some practical ways that we can pursue sexual integrity. It's important to point out that it's not enough to simply *avoid* sexual behavior outside of marriage. We need to be active in our pursuit of sexual purity. We're told throughout Scripture to be holy as God is holy. Holiness does not come simply by avoiding certain behaviors. If you determine to live your life devoted to Christ, that will affect how you live, including what you wear, what you do, how you act. 1 Corinthians 6 tells us to *flee* from sexual immorality. (v 18) Not to turn from it, but to turn and run. What can we do to flee from sexual immorality and pursue sexual integrity?

***First, devote your mind to Christ.*** As we grow in our knowledge of Christ, our understanding of and desire for sexual purity will also grow. We'll choose sexual purity because of our love for Christ. When we know Him more intimately, we'll gain a better understanding for how God has designed us to find our fulfillment in Him. Cultivate your relationship through regular quiet times, which may include Bible study, time in prayer, journaling, and memorizing Scripture. It's hard to find fulfillment in God if we're not spending time with Him.

The Bible doesn't just tell us to refrain from sex outside of marriage; it tells us to avoid sexual immorality. If we're not spending time in the Word, our standard of measure may start to blur with what the world is telling us. We become what we are exposed to, so it's important to be regularly feasting on the Word. As Christians, every area of our life is to be lived under the authority and lordship of Christ. We can't do that if we don't know how we're called to live. Become increasingly familiar with the standard of purity that God calls us to. Have you ever asked yourself any of the following questions? "How far is too far?" "How much can we do and still maintain our virginity?" "Does oral sex count as sex?" When you're seeking to become more like Christ, it helps us to answer these questions. When our goal is to just avoid having sex outside of marriage, it leaves a huge gray area about our sexual purity, but when our standard is to become increasingly more like Christ, it makes it clear that we shouldn't be asking those questions at all. Instead, we should ask, "Is my behavior pleasing to the Lord?"

Though we've already been forgiven for all the sins we have committed and will commit, we should make every effort to be found spotless before our heavenly Bridegroom. We will one day stand before Christ and want to do so in purity by faith. There's nothing we can do to earn the love of our Heavenly Bridegroom, but we keep ourselves from sin in order to show our love for Him. Live in a way that demonstrates the purity that's been made possible only through Christ's death.

To devote your mind to Christ, you may also want to take notice of how you respond to books, magazines and movies, even when they are Christian books and movies. Do you experience an unhealthy emotional response and maybe even get sexually aroused? Do you start

to compare yourself to the characters and feel that you don't measure up? Do you desire the relationships that are portrayed and develop unrealistic expectations for a husband that no real man could possibly live up to? When these worldly influences cause us to take our eyes off of Christ or when we choose to fill our minds with those things instead of with Scripture, we need to evaluate the effects the media has on our lives.

In addition to devoting our mind to Christ, we must also be intentional about **devoting our body to Christ**. Take a personal inventory of your sexual behaviors and your modesty. Ask God to reveal areas related to your sexual purity that need some attention.

Is your clothing too revealing or too tight? Mary Kassian tells us that

*Our clothing is an outward, visible symbol of an inward, spiritual reality. When you “put on Christ,” (Romans 13:14) He covers your shame and makes you what you should be. He offers you his garments “so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen.” (Rev 3:18) His covering makes us decent. (Gal 3:27) Without it, we are indecent. The physical clothing we wear is supposed to bear witness to that fact. It testifies that the Lord covers our sin and makes us presentable. That’s why we need to cover our bodies in public.<sup>7</sup>*

Look through your closet and dresser. Get rid of those items that don't give an accurate picture of your inner spiritual self. Do you have clothes that you only wear when you're around certain people? Particularly not people from church? Ask the godly women in your life for help in discerning what is appropriate if you are unsure.

How do you determine what clothes to wear? Do you seek out the latest fashion trends or are you motivated by God's standards? God cares about the heart behind what we wear, about whether our wardrobes reveal the presence of worldliness or godliness. What then shall we wear? I Peter tells us that our beauty should not come from outward adornment but instead, should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. (3:3-4) And get this, it goes on to say that this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. (v 5) I don't know about you, but that's a pretty good explanation for me about true beauty.

A Christian woman clothes herself in Christ. That's what she wears. That's how she makes herself beautiful. The clothing of Christ is the most important item in her wardrobe. Her external appearance should display, and not deny or distract from the righteous clothing of Christ that she wears. The visible should point to the invisible. The temporal should point to the eternal. Your clothing is not meant to be about you – it's meant to display deep and profound truths about the gospel.<sup>8</sup> God made women to be beautiful to men, so there's nothing inherently wrong with seeking to be attractively feminine, but there is wisdom found in the balance between dressing immodestly and dressing in a way that is drab and dowdy. Godly men find modesty attractive. Those are the kind we want. If you dress immodestly, what type of men do you think you'll attract?

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Kassian, *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Kassian.

When committing our bodies to Christ, it's important to pay attention to how you act around the men in your life. Do you use your sexuality for your gain? Maybe you use it to get attention from men or to get something that you want. Ask God to show you ways that you are using your sexuality that you may not be aware of. Ask mature, godly women around you if they see ways you use your sexuality in inappropriate ways. Pursue modesty and self-control for the sake of your brothers. Whenever you interact with a man who is not your husband in a way that you should only interact with a husband, you not only sin against God, you also wrong your brothers in Christ.<sup>9</sup>

***Finally, commit to a life of sexual purity.*** Turn from sexual immorality and pursue sexual integrity. In the fight for sexual purity, our greatest strength can be found in knowing that we are weak. The Lord's grace is sufficient and His power is made perfect in our weakness. (2 Cor 12:9-10) If that's true, why do we act in ways that aren't pleasing to God? Maybe it's because we doubt that what God has *provided* is anywhere near as good as what he's *restricted*. Think about that. Do you doubt that God's best is really best? If He calls you to a life of singleness, and thus a life of sexual abstinence, is that okay? When we understand that this life is just temporary and the best is to come, when we revel in all that's been made available to us in Christ, it makes it easier to avoid what we are told to avoid, as the pleasures of sin last only for a short time. (Heb 11:25)

How is your sexual purity at risk? Are you having sex or engaging in other sexual behaviors? Abstain from the passions of the flesh, which war against your soul. (1 Peter 2:11) We are not alone in the struggle to pursue sexual purity. Christ is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and struggles because he was tempted in every way. (Heb 4:15) Confess your sin and ask for the Lord's help in avoiding sexual temptation. The One who calls you to a life of purity is faithful and promises to sanctify us.

You may be having sex because you did it once and now really enjoy it or because it seems like everyone else - as well as your Christian friends - are doing it. Some of you may feel pressured to have sex, including oral sex, because you are afraid that if you don't put out, your boyfriend will lose interest and break up with you. Remember, your first love is Christ. Someone who doesn't help you honor your first love is not right for you. Choose to pursue godliness and not worldliness in these instances.

You can do that by actively avoiding situations where you are tempted. Maybe you're more likely to fall into sin when you're with certain people or when it's late at night. Identify those times and make a plan to stay clear of those places. If you must go, make a plan with a friend to arrive together and leave together so you have a safety net...and an excuse to leave.

You may also want to find an accountability partner. Be honest about your struggles. Allow them to see into your life and ask tough questions. If sex is your temptation, have them ask you regularly if you're having sex or thinking about having sex. If you're drawn to pornography, let them ask you about your viewing habits. Is there a woman in your life who you trust and could encourage you to seek Christ in your struggles? If so, that's great. If not, ask the

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Kassian, *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010.

Lord to bring someone into your life that could fill this role or help you to see someone who you already know who could do this. Meet face-to-face with some regularity. It's harder to lie or avoid the hard questions when you're face-to-face rather than on the phone or over email. Sin has less control over us when we expose it than when we keep it hidden.

Since we've discussed such intensely personal topics tonight, we're not going to have a small group discussion time. Instead, find a friend or two and find a place to pray. You may have things you want to discuss related to what you've heard, or you may just want to pray for each other. If you want to talk more about these issues of sex and sexuality, I'd love to talk more as would the other leaders. Make sure to take a look at the handout for a list of resources that may be helpful.