

Guarding Sexual Purity

by John MacArthur

Today's culture is obsessed with sex more than ever. It wasn't long ago that the sexualizing of society manifested itself largely through imagery and innuendo. But today you'd be hard pressed to find an aspect of public life that *isn't* overrun by sexual talk and topics. There's no discretion any more when it comes to sex—every new perversion and deviance has to be publicly celebrated, promoted, and explored.

Consequence of Sexual Perversion

The obvious, disheartening results of that trend are alarming rates of illegitimate pregnancies and births (and as a result the steady reliance on abortion to eliminate these “problems”), rapes and child molestation, and pervasive sexually transmitted diseases.

I believe God's judgment is already on our society because of such wicked attitudes and practices. Consider the number of divorces, cases of domestic violence, dysfunctional families, and murders and other violent crimes when sensual urges go uncontrolled. People cannot continue to violate God's standards of morality and integrity without eventually suffering terrible consequences.

When believers—or even *professing* believers—are immoral, the immediate consequences are especially bad because of the reproach it brings on Christ, His gospel, and His people. It is impossible for anyone to remain oblivious to the relentless media exposure of evangelical scandals and Roman Catholic pedophiles.

Condemnation of Sexual Perversion

Men and women engage in all sorts of illicit sex and perverse behavior before an affirming world. But the standard of God's Word is clear: Sexual impurity is always a sin and will always be judged. The apostle Paul warned the Ephesian Christians:

Do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints. . . . For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:3, 5–6) In 1 Corinthians 6:18 Paul tells all believers to “flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”

The same basic Greek term is used for “immorality” in both of those passages. The writer of Hebrews uses the same root word (*pornos*, from which we get the word *pornography*) for “fornicators” as he admonishes, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4). The same sexual sin is condemned (implicitly or explicitly) in all three passages.

Consecration of Sexual Purity

God has provided the means for us to avoid such sexual sin through the institution of marriage. Paul says, “Because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2).

However, the Lord did not establish marriage as a mere preventative against immorality. He views marriage as honorable (Hebrews 13:4) and a glorious symbol of Christ’s love for His church (Ephesians 5:22–33). And He desires that we would esteem it just as highly. We can do that in several ways. First, we honor marriage when the husband fulfills his duties as the head: “Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman” (1 Corinthians 11:3). Second, we honor marriage when wives submit to their husbands, as Sarah did to Abraham (1 Peter 3:1, 6). Third, we honor marriage when we make sure it is regulated by mutual love and respect, as the apostle Peter instructs us:

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

With the utmost sense of graciousness, love, and integrity, both husband and wife should have a selfless concern for the welfare of the other. Both should be focusing on what they can give rather than on what they can obtain.

God is serious about sexual purity. Sex is wonderful and fulfilling within marriage, but harmful and destructive outside of those confines:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor (1 Thessalonians 4:3–4).

Sexual purity is an essential part of our personal integrity. And as we will see next time, that integrity hinges on our ability to live our lives with godly contentment.