

SEXUAL PURITY

AND

SINGLENESS

JOE FLEENER

TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR

ETHICS

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What does it mean to be sexually pure and single? It wasn't that long ago when people knew the answer to this question, and Christians and non-Christians alike agreed for the most part what the answer was. However, in this post-modern world we are reaping the seeds that were sown in the 60's and 70's of sexual freedom and experimentation, to the point that no one, not even Christians seem to know what the answer is anymore. In recent years there has been a growing popularity to push for abstinence before marriage even in the secular world. In a recent article in the New York Times, by Susan Dominus, titled "Abstinence Minded; Does know-nothing sex ed help kids say no? It depends on what the question is", states the following:

...the rise of the sexual abstinence movement, which encourages teenagers to pledge their chastity until marriage and sponsors big conferences at which attendees wear "Stick to your commitment" T-shirts...a young Harvard graduate named Tara McCarthy published "Been There, Haven't Done That", about her decision to remain a virgin despite having been "touched, kissed, poked, prodded, rubbed, caressed, sucked, licked, bitten – you name it."

...earlier this month, two sociologists reported that among teenagers who had never had intercourse, those who made voluntary public abstinence pledges delayed that act about 18 months longer than those who did not make a pledge.

...it's hard, then, to figure out what the good news is about the abstinence pledge. It's not lowering the pregnancy rate...it's not lowering the rate of sexually transmitted diseases. And it may not even be lower rates of experimentation. Did the injunction against intercourse push teenagers to try oral sex (as half of teenage

boys have, according to a federally financed study_ or anal sex (as 10 percent of boys have, according to the same study)?

...By involving 6,800 students in a survey about sex and asking them solely about vaginal intercourse, the study reinforced the dangerous notion that other stuff doesn't count, couldn't really hurt.

...No wonder teenagers are drawn to Britney Spears, a proudly self-identifying virgin who practically pole-dances on prime-time TV then says she's waiting for true love. In one navel-baring, camera-ready package, she personifies teenagers' semiotic world. Like the Sisqo videos they watch, the shampoo commercials they channel-surf past, the Web sites they check out alone in their rooms, Spears saturates kids with sexuality; then, like their teachers, she tells them to guard their chastity.¹

Although this article is specifically talking about the teens in our culture, it is not in appropriate to apply the same references and critiques to the culture of our singles as a whole, when it comes to their attitudes about sex. When is sexual purity? Does the Bible speak toward this subject and if so does it or can it apply to the singles that live in the post-modern world?

I Thessalonians 4:1-8 and I Corinthians 7 speak toward this issue directly:

¹Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, *so* ye would abound more and more. ²For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. ³For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: ⁴That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; ⁵Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: ⁶That no *man* go beyond and defraud his

¹ Dominus, Susan; *Abstinence Minded*:
<http://www.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20010121mag-wwln.html>.

brother in *any* matter: because that the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. ⁷For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. ⁸He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

¹Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman. ²Nevertheless, *to avoid* fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. ³Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.... ⁹But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

In I Thess. 4:3 Paul says that we are to "...abstain from fornication", a more clear translation would be "...keep your distance from sexual sin of any kind". Paul states that this is the will of God for us, and our continued growth as Christians. He later states in verse 8 that to despise this "restriction" is to actually despise God. In I Cor. 7:2 and 9 Paul states that one ought to marry in order to avoid the possibility of violating God's restriction on physical contact outside of marriage, if he/she cannot control their desires.

However, today people, including many Christians, are redefining for themselves what constitutes unbiblical physical contact. Many singles are finding themselves several years older than their parents were when they got married and still with no prospects of marriage. This being the case and the constant bombardment of sexually explicit information, many Christian singles are beginning to compromise standards that were once non-negotiable.

Even if a Christian single still holds to the standard that sexual intercourse in outside of the parameters of Scripture, it is becoming more and more common for them to allow themselves to be involved in other sexual acts (i.e. oral sex, touching, petting, fondling, etc.), convincing themselves that they are acceptable. How can a single Christian today develop a Biblical sexual ethic? Given the reality that they are probably

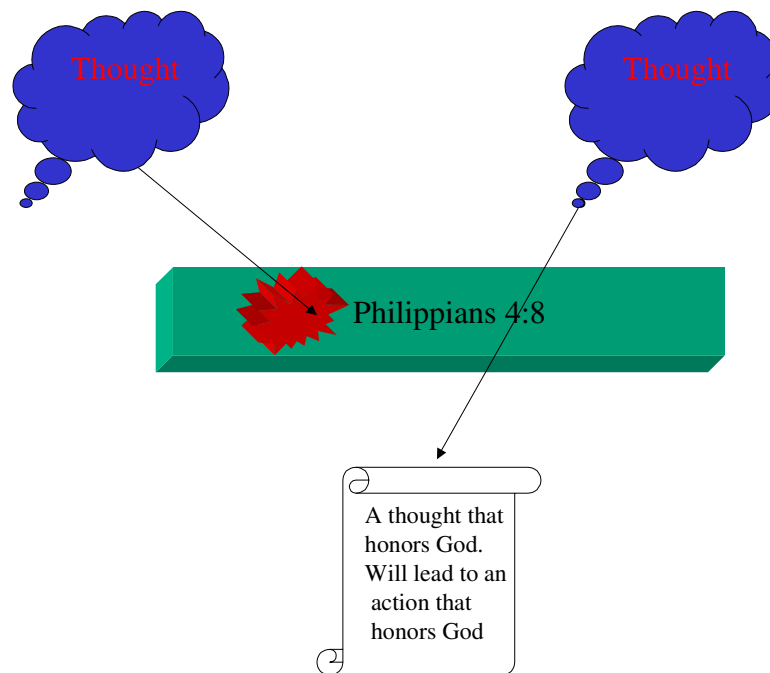
going to be single longer than their parents were. Given the fact that they will not be able to avoid the social pressure of sexual temptations. Given the stark reality of their own sinfulness. What steps can be taken and what barriers can be built to protect them from “sexual sin of any kind”?

I believe a Christian single can develop a Biblical sexual ethic for themselves by taking the following steps:

1. They must make it their heart’s desire to know what God says on the subject and to obey what He says. The world has a contradictory standard that is very appealing to every Christian. There is no way to escape being brought face to face with the world’s alternatives, so one must plan ahead. The Christian single must be proactive in planning to find out what God says about any and every situation before proceeding, and determine that whatever God says even if it goes against all of their fleshly desires he/she will obey.

2. Ultimately one’s thoughts always precede one’s actions. It is not unusual at all to hear a Christian single state after having crossed the line into sexual intercourse, “It all happened before I could even think about what was going on”, or “I wasn’t thinking”. The facts as laid out in Scripture teach that in fact that is not possible. We always think before we act. With this in mind, coming up with a great list of does and don’ts will not ultimately help. Taking some oath of abstinence will not in and of itself guard one from sexual immorality. The battle is in the mind and therefore must be focused there. Jesus said, “**Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.**” (Matthew 5:27,28). “**O generation of**

vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” (Matthew 12:34). Sexual sin actually begins long before physical contact. It begins in the mind. The key Scripture for every single Christian (actually every Christian, for that matter), is Philippians 4:8. Every thought that enters the mind must be run through the grid of Philippians 4:8 before it is acted on. The following diagram will attempt to show this:



If in the process of analyzing one's thoughts according to Philippians 4:8 a particular thought is not allowed to fall through the grid then it is obvious that the action associated with that thought should not continue. In fact the thought itself should not continue. One should do as 2 Corinthians 10:5 states "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing

that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”.

Has the world attempted to redefine the parameters of executable sexual behavior? Of course! Have many Christian singles fallen into the trap of thinking that many things the world suggests is OK with God? Sadly yes! However, we can be certain that God is not confused and He is the same yesterday today and forever. We must maintain a biblical world view when it relates to all of life especially as singles the this aspect of life related to one’s sexual practices. God’s word does speak to this subject quite clearly. However, many Christians have minimized Scripture’s teaching on the subject to external actions, pledges or lack thereof and have not sufficiently dealt with the root issue of one’s heart/thoughts. God’s word tells us to keep our distance, not to toe the line. The only way this is possible is by practicing Philippians 4:8 discipline. If one tries to keep a list or an external pledge only, then we are bound to fail, because we have not addressed the real problem – MY SINFUL HEART!

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