

RCL Year B: 2 Epiphany	<p><b>An Interactive Message on Character and Conduct in the New Life: Sexual Purity</b></p> <p>1 Corinthians 6.12-20</p> <p>by Tim Isbell</p>	Preached 1/25/09
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*Thesis:* God's call on us is to live lives of sexual purity, and he provides the resources to do this even while living in a very impure world.

## Special message today (optional section)

*Explain "interactive;" prepare the congregation for an interactive time for the last 10 minutes of the sermon.*

*This sermon is part of a 10 sermon series. The idea is to preach about 2/3 as long as usual and then open the floor for questions and comments. This is not a style I recommend for every Sunday, but it is a nice change of pace. In my case, I spread the 10 sermons over about 2 years.*

### **Scripture says a lot about "character and conduct."**

It is a highlight of the Old Testament: Read Leviticus 19.1-18. Highlight v.16 as the part of "character and conduct" we'll focus on today.

"Character and conduct" is also a highlight of the New Testament: Consider Paul's letter to Ephesus. Read Ephesians 4:1-3 (NLT). Later in this same chapter, Paul writes something very specific about how we talk with one another. Read Ephesians 4.29.

### ***Even our Nazarene Covenant of Christian Character deals with the call to holy living and specifically points to how we speak to one another.***

From the Nazarene Manual: "...members commit to avoid what scripture teaches us to avoid. This includes profane speech, sexual impurity, practices that are destructive to our bodies or minds, quarreling, gossiping, slandering, dishonest behavior, immodest or prideful dress, and entertainment that dishonors God.

In fact, this is where our whole Interactive Series on Character and Conduct in the New Life comes from: from my teaching of the Nazarene Membership Class.

Over the years, I've taught this class many times. It covers a lot of ground and provides lots of opportunities for interaction. I can never predict what specific areas any given class will want to dive into. But over the years, they've drilled down into most of them. Since those discussions are so rich, I decided that occasionally, we can open up time in our worship for this same sort of interaction.

## **Read 1 Cor 6.9-20. Notice 4 things from this text:**

### ***(V9-11) Paul is writing to believers!***

... who had come from lifestyles saturated by the world's sexual values/practices.

All received God's forgiveness; all were cleansed and made right with God because they trusted in the Lord Jesus.

But now I hear that you are slipping back and saying some troubling things!

### ***(V12-20) Paul is responding to things he's heard floating out from Corinth (probably from a letter from some people there):***

"Now that we are free in Jesus Christ, everything is okay for me to do."

"God made food for the stomach, and the stomach for food. It's how God designed our bodies. Same with sex, it's just another appetite to satisfy. God only cares about our spirit anyway, and we trust Jesus, so when we die, our spirits will go to heaven anyway!"

### ***Paul uses a rhetorical question to heighten impact -***

Reread v15-19, note V18 ... "Run from sexual sin! No other sin as clearly affects the body as this one does."

It's popular to think all sins are the same; Paul says sexual sin is more dangerous.

## **Paul responds with 5 theological affirmations**

- Your bodies are for the Lord, and the Lord is for your bodies.
- God raised the Lord, and he will raise your bodies, too.
- Not just your spirits but your bodies are members of Christ.
- Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit of Jesus.
- You are not your own, you were bought with the price of Jesus' blood on the cross.

Paul's point is to be careful with your bodies, they are not throw-aways at death. The fact that your body is destined for resurrection underscores the importance God puts on our bodies.

## **2 more scriptures of note.**

***Exodus 20.14,17 - adultery & coveting.***

***Matt 5.27-28 - lusting is a sin even before any action. What is lust?***

Lust is a preoccupation with the object of our desire ... coveting.

Admiration recognizes what it sees, then walks away without desiring to possess it. Christians set limits on what we allow ourselves to desire. It's always been a challenge in every age. It was true in 1<sup>st</sup> century Corinth and in 21<sup>st</sup> century California.

When our "look" is to have sexual stimulation, it has turned to lust.

This kind of "look" is out of bounds for a Christian, even when the person we look at

invites our attention.

***Human sexuality is more than biology. It's sacred.***

God designed the sexual union between husband/wife to be a model that helps us grasp the quality and passion of the relationship he wants with us.

Anything this powerful, when contaminated by sin, becomes terribly destructive.

***Sexual impurity starts in the mind and easily becomes compulsive/addictive.***

Our culture is saturated with unhealthy sexual images and stories.

Video media of all kinds: TV, movies, and games are full of sexual attitudes and behaviors far outside the bounds of Christian teaching.

94% of sex scenes in soap operas are between unmarried people.

Popular music and literature are full of sexual impurity.

If we live every day in a culture saturated with sexual impurity, and we welcome it into our minds and hearts, it will contaminate our sexuality. Guaranteed.

**So, how shall Christians live in the world but not of it?**

**Take this 2-question sexual purity test for married people.**

I know there are many different kinds of people here. Some have lost their spouse, some may want to be married but are not, or be in a courtship stage or dating, and some are teens who aren't yet ready to date.

I can't address all these, but I will address married couples. If you are in another category, you can see me privately. Or, better yet, if you are a woman, talk with another mature Christian woman. Here's the 1<sup>st</sup> question:

***1. Do I have a secret or isolated part of my sexual life that I keep from my spouse?***

If so, DANGER.

***2. Is there a part of my sexual life where, after I act it out, I feel guilt or despair?***

If so, DANGER. Realize that your guilt may be true guilt or false guilt. You will probably need to talk to a mature Christian to determine it. Either way, danger!

**When we are in sexual purity/impurity, there is hope...**

***1 Corinthians 6:11 says: Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed, made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

If you've crossed the line, confess and repent ...

We don't have to live with shame. Christ died to set us not just from the guilt of sin but also from the shame.

Sometimes, the hardest thing to trust God for is forgiveness. But that's God's promise –

trust him in everything – especially forgiveness from our shame and guilt. His heart loves us deeply, and he wants to set us free – only then can we incarnate the good news to others.

### **A strategy for sexual purity**

For most of us, the answer is **not** to retreat from the world. Jesus' command is clear: Go to all nations, tell them the good news that forgiveness for sins is available, and invite them into the kingdom of the living God.

We can't do this hidden in isolation. We are called to follow Jesus – and he certainly did not run and hide.

All who trust Jesus receive his Spirit and power to overcome the world. God expects us to trust him in this, too.

We must trust the Bible where it says, **1 Corinthians 10:13**: No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

So, what's a workable strategy to live sexual purity in an impure world? ... 2 parts.

### **Guard our eyes, minds, and hearts.**

Guard our eyes (especially for men). Guard our minds ... fantasy life (especially for women). Research suggests that women respond more emotionally and men more visually. Men are attracted to sexual images, and women to romance novels. On the internet: Men more often get in trouble with explicit websites; women get in trouble in chat rooms.

Guard our hearts. Give the first part of our day to Jesus and invite his Spirit into the day. Love your wife/husband for who they are today and not the young woman/man they were when you married - or the person you want them to become.

### **Here's how to GUARD:**

- Avoid situations you know are sexually tempting for you. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says run from sexual sin! Like Joseph in the Old Testament.
- When the Holy Spirit tips you off that a temptation approaches, "HALT." It's an acronym. Ask yourself (or the Spirit), "Am I... "
  - Hungry or Hurt
  - Angry or Anxious
  - Lonely
  - Tired

If any answer is "yes", you're in danger of making a bad decision. Raise your guard!

- Memorize/apply 1 Cor 10.13
- Count the cost... There is a cost even if not caught. Count the cost for your spouse (or future spouse) and your family. Remember the cost Christ paid for

your forgiveness.

- Build accountability with 1 or 2 peers.

For more on this, look at the [Transforming Partnerships](#) link at [www.isbellonline.org](http://www.isbellonline.org).

## Question time ...

<b>Other resources:</b>
Click on the link for the <a href="#">Google Slides</a> . (Similar to PowerPoint)