



January 8, 2012

Seeking Purity in a Sensual Culture

Background Passage

Ephesians 5:1-21

Focal Verses

Ephesians 5:1-5, 8-12, 15-16

What This Lesson Is About

We live pure lives as we imitate God and walk in His love, light, and wisdom.

Why This Lesson Is Important

In our culture, many

people seek to satisfy their own sensual appetites without considering even for a moment another way might be better. God created us as sensual beings, but our culture regards the sensual part of us to be the supreme part of us, and it encourages us to pursue pleasure no matter what. Yet relationships often are torn apart in a world of

self-serving people. Christians, however, are called to a standard of godly purity. This doesn't eliminate pleasure; it enhances it!

How This Lesson Can Impact Your Life

This lesson can help you (1) identify ways ungodly messages have influenced you and (2) cultivate and maintain a lifestyle of purity.

Christians are exposed constantly to a culture that is totally opposed to God and His plan for individuals and relationships. How do we know what God wants? He's revealed all we need to know in His Word, the Bible. Society doesn't heed God's Word, however. Television shows portray casual sex as perfectly normal and acceptable, and studies indicate people are buying into this type of moral mind-set. A Gallup Study conducted May 3-6, 2010, based on 1,029 telephone interviews of adults, with a margin of error of +/- 4 percent indicated that 59 percent of people believe sexual relations "between an unmarried man and woman" are morally acceptable. The same study found that 52 percent believe homosexual relations are acceptable, and 69 percent believe divorce is acceptable (see <http://www.gallup.com/poll/137357/Four-Moral-Issues-Sharply-Divide-Americans.aspx>). As Mr. Spock told Dr. McCoy in the *Star Trek* episode titled "The Gamesters of Triskelion" (originally aired 5 January 1968), "Constant exposure does result in a certain degree of contamination" (see http://www.tvrage.com/Star_Trek/episodes/162352?show_recap=1).

Indeed, "constant exposure" seems to have contaminated the church as well. In a 2009 blog post, author and researcher Ed Stetzer cited findings from pollster George Barna showing only 46 percent of adults who classify themselves as born again believe moral truth is absolute and unchanging (see <http://www.edstetzer.com/2009/03/barna-how-many-have-a-biblical.html>). Clearly, a belief in absolute truth is foundational to understanding all that is right and wrong from a biblical perspective. As believers, we must understand clearly what it means to live morally pure lives. If we don't know what *pure* means, we have no point of reference by which to evaluate attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles. In James 1:27, James wrote "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father" includes keeping oneself "unspotted from the world." This Bible study will explore at least part of what that means.

Walk in Love

Ephesians 5:1-5

¹Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

Discover Deeper Meaning

Paul compared Christ's sacrifice on the cross to the Old Testament fragrant offerings—**sweet-smelling savor**—presented on the altar (Leviticus 1–3 details three kinds of fragrant offerings). The burnt offering pictured complete devotion to God, the grain or meal offering showed man's thankfulness for God's grace, and the fellowship or peace offering pointed to the peace that came by experiencing God's love. As the fumes ascended from the fires toward heaven, these sacrifices pleased God, and He accepted the person who offered it. Of course, no Old Testament sacrifice was totally adequate; such sacrifices foreshadowed Christ's death on the cross. On the cross Christ offered Himself as a fragrant offering or *sweet-smelling savor* to the Father, thus pleasing Him with a totally sufficient sacrifice to pay for humanity's sins.

²And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.


³But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

⁴Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

⁵For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Paul began this section of Ephesians with an amazing idea: **Be...followers of God.** *Followers* translates the word from which we get our term *mimic*. Obviously Paul wasn't talking about mimicking God disrespectfully, but imitating Him with a keen awareness of His authority and our responsibility to obey. In Paul's day, orators mimicked the way the master speakers spoke, so Paul commanded us to mimic God. The end result of this imitation is


that we will **walk in love**, just as the Messiah **loved us** and died **for us**.

 *In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus indicated He did not want to go through the crucifixion (see Matt. 26:36-44); yet He did so out of His love for us. What are some things you do not want to do but would do anyway to demonstrate your love for someone?*

In verse 3 Paul described a loving walk by listing actions we should *not* do. **Fornication** translates the word from which we get *pornography* and referred to any kind of sex outside of marriage. **Uncleanness** describes a person who is morally stained. **Covetousness** is the desire to have more; in this context it probably means more lewd living. Paul told his readers not to even go there: **Let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.**

In 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, Paul said to “flee” from immorality. Unlike other sins, this one gets under a person’s skin and can take control. I am convinced one reason for America’s skyrocketing divorce rate is that couples who cannot get along marry anyway because their relationship is dominated by their desire for sex. But uncontrolled passions are manifested in other forms of sinful behavior as well. According to one poll with 1,000 respondents, half of males and one-fifth of females—all of whom are assumed to be Christians—are addicted to porn. Since this was an online poll, the results are unscientific, but they nevertheless are very disturbing (see <http://christiannews.christianet.com/1154951956.htm>).

It is time for Christians to turn off certain TV shows, avoid certain Web sites, and even walk out of certain movies and request refunds. And Christians should never watch “adult” movies. I heard a great definition for hypocrisy recently: Hypocrisy is complaining about the sex and bad language on TV shows you record.

 *What lines have you drawn concerning entertainment choices and activities with friends and family members?*

 *For whom are you praying as he/she/they face worldly enticements?*

How Does this Lesson Relate to Me?

Some readers may wonder how this particular Bible study relates to them. They have been Christians for many years, lived morally pure lives, and continue to live lives of integrity today. If you're such a person, *thank you for being such a sterling example to others!* The church—your local church, as well as the church at large—needs your example and prayerful support. As you study this lesson, here are some points of application for you:

- Seek to more clearly understand God's holiness. The reason God commands His people to be pure is because He Himself is pure. This study emphasizes God's utter holiness.
- Seek to understand better the pressures many of your brothers and sisters in Christ face. Pray for them as they seek to remain pure in an impure world.
- Draw from your experience and wisdom to make sound arguments for society to return to moral truth.
- Pray for revival in the church, and that God's people would be able to contend for moral absolutes in a world that needs to be reminded of the benefits of affirming that absolute truth exists. After all, it does!

In verse 4 Paul described a loving walk in terms of the kind of talk a follower of Christ must avoid. In Paul's day, sexual innuendo, profanity, and crude jokes were a popular form of humor. Sound familiar? Things haven't changed all that much, have they? Paul said such talk is **not convenient**; that is, it is not proper. My father-in-law used to say of this brand of worldly speech, "What came out of his mouth, I wouldn't hold in my hand!"

A **whoremonger** is an immoral person. An **unclean person** is *unclean* in a moral sense. Paul also mentioned a **covetous man, who is an idolater**. None of these **hath any inheritance in God's kingdom**. A believer who occasionally commits these sins won't lose his salvation, but our goal should be not to commit them at all. Paul was writing about unrepentant people.

Walk in Light

Ephesians 5:8-12

⁸For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

⁹(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

¹⁰Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

¹¹And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

¹²For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

Another way we cultivate and maintain purity is to walk in light. Surprisingly, Paul did not say here we were followers or members of darkness before meeting Christ; he said we **were sometimes darkness**. Then we met Him, and our very identity changed: we became **light!** So we should **walk as children of light**.

People who walk in light live fruitful lives; thus, Paul mentioned **the fruit of the Spirit...goodness** (which in this context, probably means a generous spirit), **righteousness and truth**. In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul listed nine qualities that he designated as *fruit of the Spirit*: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” When people walk in the light their lives shine like light—they look like Jesus. Why? Because they are continually **proving**—literally, testing to discover—**what is acceptable unto the Lord**. How do we discover what is pleasing to God? In small group Bible studies like Sunday School we meet with other believers to dig into the Word of God to learn what it means for our lives. In worship we experience in song and sermon what God wants us to become. And in our own private Bible reading time we learn how a Christian is supposed to live. How diligently are you *proving* what pleases God through these means?

Keep in mind we do not grow *fruit*. We may learn what an apple tree needs to produce apples. We may apply the right fertilizer and insecticide, keep the tree pruned, and protect it from killer frosts; but we don't grow apples—God does. So it is with spiritual fruit.

God grows the fruit in our lives when we ask Him to do so (see 1 John 5:14-15), and as we cooperate with Him. How well are you cooperating with God as He seeks to produce fruit in your life?

People who walk in the light avoid **the unfruitful works of darkness**. Consider Tim Tebow, arguably the most popular football player in the Southeastern Conference during his career. Former star of the Florida Gators, Heisman Trophy winner, and a national college football championship to his credit, Tebow surely faced strong sexual temptations his entire college career. Still, he went on record that he is saving himself for marriage. At least one stunned media source called him “superhuman in every way” (<http://www.aolnews.com/2009/07/23/tim-tebow-says-hes-still-a-virgin-saving-himself-for-marriage/>). From a biblical perspective, however, Tebow was simply walking in the light and avoiding dark deeds.

Walk in Wisdom

Ephesians 5:15-16

¹⁵See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

¹⁶Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

What else do we need to do to find purity? Walk in wisdom. We might describe two kinds of people in this world: those to whom life happens, and those who happen to life. Paul recommended approaching life with a purpose and meeting it head on.

See then that ye walk circumspectly can mean, “Be sure that you always walk carefully.” When I go to my car in a dark parking lot, I am continually scanning the shadows and blind corners, looking for a threat. This is the **wise** thing to do.

We need to keep our eyes open to make the most of our time. **Redeeming the time** means to buy back or to seize a strategic opportunity to make a positive difference in the world around us. Christians who redeem the time not only stay connected to other believers for instruction and encouragement, but also build relationships with their unchurched neighbors so that they can help them meet Jesus. Why is this vital? **The days are evil**. *Evil* refers

to a determined resistance to good. We are in a world determined to do things any way but God's way. For example, people live together before marriage, believing it will help them avoid divorce, but studies show the exact opposite happens (see www.lifesitenews.com/news/archive/ldn/2009/jul/09071502). How we live needs to prove to others God's ways are best (see Rom. 12:1-2).

➔ *In what ways are you "redeeming the time"?*

How does wisely approaching life for the purpose of making a difference help us to seek purity in a sensual culture? Taking this approach, with God's help, I am wisely going to happen to life. I will commit to a personal devotional time so that I can have the spiritual power to remain pure (see Ps. 119:9-11; 1 Pet. 2:1-2) and to help others (see Rom. 15:1-2). I commit to be connected to a local church that will help me be the kind of person God can use (see Heb. 10:23-25). I will guard my affections from any relationships that would lead me away from my commitment to my spouse or my future spouse (see Prov. 7:4-5). And I am going to invest the time necessary to build healthy relationships with my friends and family (see 1 Cor. 13:1-8a). The days are evil, so I resolve to stand firm against that evil.

The Life Word

Would you drink a glass of water that was clouded with dirt? No! We want pure water; impurities are dangerous. Communities spend much money and go to great effort to ensure our drinking water is pure and safe. We are surrounded by a culture determined to muddy up the water of our spiritual lives with sensual impurities. Sinful attitudes and actions, like contaminants, have led to widespread sexually transmitted diseases, unexpected and unwanted pregnancies, abortions, broken hearts, broken marriages, and broken lives. The Bible shows us how to live pure lives in an impure world. How faithfully are you following what it teaches?