

Living pure in an impure world

Gen 39:7 – 15

This article is based upon a sermon preached by Rev. Philip Gardiner to young men in Annalong FPC Youth Fellowship on Friday 27th November 2009. It deals with the subject of sexual purity.

We live in a world that is obsessed with sex; this is evident in the articles that appear in magazines, the content of television programmes and the lifestyle of many around us. As the Christian looks on at this, it is very easy for us to get a view that sex is something that is dirty. We could come to the conclusion that sex is for the world and it has nothing to do with the Christian.

It is sad that our view of sexuality issues has been governed by the notions of the world rather than by the Word of God. We ought always to remember that sex was part of God's GOOD creation. In Genesis 2:24 we read, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." In these words we read of the Biblical account of the institution of marriage. In the next verse we read these words, "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." (Genesis 2:25). It is notable that before the fall of man, there was no shame in this state of nakedness. In Genesis 4:1 we read, "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived." Even after the fall of man we read of Adam knowing his wife in an intimate sense, it is very evident that this was to be a natural and a good part of marriage. Christian marriage is a very complex matter. It is vital that there would be emotional and spiritual harmony, but it must be remembered that there is also a physical side to the husband-wife relationship.

I must emphasise that physical intimacy between a man and woman is to take place only within the confines of marriage. In Genesis 2:24 we read that a man is to "leave" his father and mother and be joined (or "cleave") to his wife and then become one flesh. This is a clear reference to marriage. Those words did not apply to Adam and Eve only; they are God's standard for the human race. It could easily be argued that those words in Genesis 2 have a greater reference for us than they had for Adam and Eve, for Adam did not have a father or mother to leave. Therefore, this is God's standard, a man and woman are only to be "one flesh" after they are married.

The content of this article is directed especially to young men who are not yet married. The desire for physical intimacy with someone of the opposite sex is one that is natural, it is part of how the Lord has made us. Mere physical desires are not sinful, yet lusting after a woman, the entertainment of such lustful thoughts and engagement in premarital intimacy certainly is.

In the Bible there are many examples of people who got the issue of sexual intimacy wrong and committed sexual sin. In this article we want to consider someone who got it right, namely Joseph.

1. The reality of the believer in an impure world

It is foolish to bury our heads in the sand and pretend the issue of living pure in an impure world is irrelevant. Sadly some Christians have been of the attitude, “If we don’t talk about it, it doesn’t exist.” However, it is not only our daily experience that shows that young people face these matters but the Bible makes it clear this is an important issue as well. There were many individuals in the Word of God who faced temptation to sexual sin, so this is something that is relevant.

Remember that when we read of Joseph here in Genesis 39 he was in a situation where he could very easily have become trapped in sin. I want us to see some details that show how up-to-date this record in Genesis 39 really is.

(a) there was a situation that developed not of his own making

Joseph had never planned to become the object of Mrs Potiphar’s attractions. One day when Joseph was in Potiphar’s home working as the manager of Potiphar’s house, the woman approached him and said, “lie with me.”

There is absolutely no indication that Joseph had planned such a thing might happen. In fact his reaction makes it clear it never was his attention that he would become the focus of her attention.

This woman was **daring**, she seemed to be absolutely free from any embarrassment or shame about her proposal; she put it forward as if it was normal activity. She was also a **determined** woman; her persistence is

shown in the words, “day by day” (v10). She was also a **devious** woman. In Genesis 39:11 we can see she had set up a situation where no-one else was in the house, she tried to manipulate circumstances to get her own way.

I do not want to suggest that sexual sin is always or even usually on account of a woman trying to influence a young man. It may well be that men are more guilty of making such proposals than women. However, there are times when young men can become the object of someone’s attraction, and perhaps as a result of flattery get pulled in a certain direction with terrible results.

(b) no-one was watching what was going on

There are many times when young men fall into this sin because they have allowed themselves to be in a situation where they are on their own with a girl, and they then use the excuse, no-one is watching what is taking place. Sometimes when young people get away from home, they think, ‘I have some independence now, I can do what I want.’ Such an attitude is certainly dangerous.

I want you to notice that when Joseph was on his own with this woman, he did not use this as an excuse to sin, rather he used it as a reason NOT to sin. In v8 Joseph said his master didn’t know what was going on, therefore he would not do it.

If you are engaged in a relationship, and you are not yet married, you must be careful about those times when you are alone with your girlfriend. You must prepare to keep yourself pure, and insist that you keep yourself clear.

(c) Joseph could have been tempted to think this was for his good

Sometimes young people feel, I must engage in this act of intimacy because everyone else is doing it. Some young people are afraid that the other person will think they are odd if they refuse, and so as a result of their cowardice are drawn into sin.

I want you to think of Joseph while he was the boss in Potiphar’s house. It is clear that Mrs Potiphar had great power in the house. Joseph could have been tempted then to think he needed to keep on her side. He could have assumed that if he conformed to her suggestions that he she would speak

even more favourably about him to Potiphar. However, Joseph knew that it is not possible to take coals in your bosom and not be burned. (Proverbs 6:27). If you think that by breaking God's law things will go better for you, you are badly deceived, you might as well go to the open fire and take hot coals, gather them in your jumper and pretend to be surprised when you get burned.

While many are "at it" it is not true that "all are at it," and even if it were, it doesn't make it right. Keep yourself pure.

2. The resistance by the believer of an impure world

While it is true that we live in an immoral world, we are not mean to adopt the standards of the world. The apostle John said, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." (1 John 2:15).

How can we resist the temptation to follow the world?

a. Recognise that sex outside of Biblical boundaries is sin

If you are going to underestimate the sinfulness of premarital sex, then it is unlikely you will avoid it. We are always to acknowledge "the sinfulness of sin."

b. Recognise that it is sin against your own body

Paul gave the commandment that we are to "flee fornication", he then said that those who commit fornication sin against their own body. (See 1 Corinthians 6:18). The Christian must not say, "This is my body, I will do what I want." Those who are saved do not have the right to decide how they use their own body.

c. Recognise that it is sin against another's body

The one who engages in sinful intimacy not only defiles their own body, they defile the other person. Some may seek to justify their sin by saying it was merely an expression of their love. True love will not cause a man to defile the one whom he professes to love, rather he will respect her body.

d. Recognise most of all that it is sin against the Lord

Joseph acknowledged this in v9. This admission that sexual sin was sin against the Lord was made by David in Psalm 51:4: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight..." When David said

his sin was against God “only,” he was not suggesting that he hadn’t sinned against his own body or against Bathsheba, but he was emphasising that most of all it was sin against the Lord. If you profess to love the Lord, then you must do nothing that will be sin against Him.

3. The responsibility of the believer in an impure world

There are times when young people have been guilty of premarital intimacy and in an effort to defend their sin they will say, “It just happened.” They try to put forward this notion that they couldn’t prevent this sin happening. Such a suggestion is foolish.

As we consider Joseph, he recognised that the responsibility to do the right thing lay with him. Joseph came to recognise that he couldn’t hide behind any excuse, had he sinned (and we are glad he didn’t) he would have to bear the responsibility. On account of this realisation, we read in v12 “he got him out,” Joseph took himself out of the situation; he saw his responsibility and ran. Joseph couldn’t depend upon his parents or any other person to deliver him; he had to do it himself. That is the case with you as well, if you face temptation, the responsibility is upon you to take yourself out of those circumstances.

It is true there are certain sins that we are to fight, however, when someone faces this sin they are to “flee.” (2 Timothy 2:22)

Sometimes people ask the question, “How far can I go?” Others may ask “What would be too far?” Dear reader, if that is your question you are in the wrong direction. Generally those who ask such questions desire to go as close to breaking the Lord’s command as is permitted, there is a desire to go as close to boundary line as would be allowed. That is never to be the desire of the Christian.

Sometimes we speak of “drawing a line in the sand.” When the Christian draws a line in the sand, we are never to stand near it, but rather run as far from it as possible. If you stand close to the line, you will probably cross over it.

While I am hesitant about dictating boundary lines to you, I certainly want to emphasise that the removal of clothes is totally unacceptable. Another good guide is if you don’t possess it, don’t touch it. Let me emphasise

again, keep a large distance between your behaviour and any boundary line.

Young Christian, **take care what you watch and what you look at.** Each and every day many of us are only a click away from looking at that which is extremely inappropriate. We need to be diligent about what emails we read and what pages on the web we visit. Never think I am only going to read this because I am curious, that is the devil's ploy to get you hooked. You have a responsibility to keep your mind and your heart pure.

As we consider the account of Joseph, it is encouraging to remember that Joseph did eventually marry. (Read Genesis 41:45,50). I am sure when Joseph married Asenath he was very grateful to the Lord for His help in delivering him from the hand of Potiphar's wife. When he married he was not plagued with guilt about what he had done in Potiphar's house, for he had fled. Does this not remind us that it is always best to wait upon the Lord, because His timing is perfect? (Psalm 27:14, Ecclesiastes 3:11).

In closing I would like to remind you that Joseph is a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph was despised by His brethren, so Christ came to His own, but they would not receive Him. Joseph was sold in Egypt for silver, so the Saviour was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver by Judas. Joseph had to suffer humiliation before he was exalted as a prince in Egypt. So too, before Christ was exalted at the Father's right hand he suffered terrible humiliation.

We can think then of how Joseph was given a bride, so Christ too is given a bride, the church of Christ. Asenath is then a picture of the sinner, she came from a background of heathenism. So we are born in sin, members of a fallen race. But in God's grace, the Lord has taken us to Himself; the believer has become the bride of Christ.

As we think of this issue of purity, surely the key to us maintaining it is to keep our attention fixed upon the One we are married to. (Jeremiah 3:14). As we keep our attention upon Christ, we will be enabled by His help to be pure in an impure world.