**HEALTHY CHURCHES PROMOTE PURITY**

**(1 Corinthians 7)**

 John MacArthur became the pastor/teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California in 1969. He never left. He is still their pastor after 50 years. Under his leadership and ministry, the church has experienced enormous growth. He once said:

 If there is any key to an effective church, it is holiness. If God blesses anything, it is purity. With all the stuff thrown at you that you need to do in your church, I’d like to throw in my little shot. Start here: A pure church is an awesome weapon in God's hand.

 It has been observed that a surgeon can use just about any instrument except a dirty one. Likewise, if we want to be used by the Lord in His service, we need to be clean. Of course, through His death on the cross and our faith in Him, we were made clean on the inside, but we can lose our cleanness on the outside due to our interaction with the world.

 Yesterday, I traveled to Caldwell, Kansas to do a memorial service for a family I met through my work at Hospice Circle of Love. I put on a clean suit before I left in the morning. By the time I got in the afternoon, I noticed it wasn’t clean anymore. I bumped up against a car. At lunch in the fellowship hall of this church I took off my jacket and put it on the back of my chair. The sleeves trailed the ground and got a bit dusty.

 It is difficult to interact with the world and not get a bit soiled by it.

 1 John 1:9 is an appropriate verse for Christians to follow: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

 Jesus wants His church to be pure, and He will take action when it is not. Before we turn to tonight’s passage, I want to take a moment to show you a message Jesus had for a church that existed during the days of the NT. Look at Revelation 2:18-29. Jesus had strong words because He takes a strong stand against immorality and for purity, especially sexual purity. Equally strong words were employed in the previous message to the Church at Pergamum. Look at 2:14-16.

 We have been examining Church health by focusing on Paul’s letter to the Church at Corinth. That church was not a particularly healthy body, but God was using Paul to nurse that church to health. So far, we have seen that health churches:

* Remember
* Unite
* Are Led by Faithful Leaders
* And Practice Discipline.

 One time when discipline is necessary is when members of the church have fallen into sexual sin and refuse to leave those relationships. Toward the end of 1 Corinthians 6, Paul calls upon the people of the Church to flee from sexual immorality.

 The City of Corinth was particularly loose in its sexual morals. It was part of their culture that a man was to have a wife for children and a lover for pleasure. Everybody knew their place, and they were to be fine with that.

 To them, like many in our day, sexual relations was just a bodily function. Paul argues that point in 6:13. He quotes one of their common phrases and takes his stand against it. He calls upon the Corinthian believers in the last verse of chapter 6 to glorify God with their body.

 Chapter 7 will be our focus tonight. We won’t be able to cover everything, but based on these verses, I want to highlight two ways in which we can promote sexual purity. Let’s read vv. 1-9.

 Notice that Paul is responding to a question he had received in writing from Corinth (v. 1). In this latter half of the letter, Paul gives specific attention to specific topics about which the church had inquired. He discusses food offered to idols, how to observe the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts, the Resurrection, and an offering for the poor.

 There are two states in which a person can be when he or she reaches adulthood: single or married. Paul addresses both states showing the advantages and complications associated with both of them. Sexual purity can be achieved through either one if done right.

 Based on what Paul wrote, let me give two pieces of counsel to the church in our goal to promote sexual purity.

1. **WE CAN PROMOTE SEXUAL PURITY BY HONORING SINGLENESS FOR SOME.**

 Notice what Paul wrote in vv. 6-7. What is Paul saying? He wants others to be as he is. What was Paul? Paul was single. There is disagreement as to whether Paul had ever been married. Some say that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, and to be a member of that high court, you had to be married, but there is not clear evidence he was ever a member of that body. If he had been married, either his wife left him when he became a Christian or she died. Paul mentions neither of those biographical details. I tend to think Paul had never gotten married.

 He refers to singleness as a gift. Many do not view singleness that way. If it is a gift, they want to return it for something else.

 What he means is that the ability to remain pure while being single is a gift from God, and he urges those who have such a gift to use it.

 Most people grow up assuming they will one day marry. Until they marry, they go through life looking for Mr. or Miss Right. Our society subtlely and not-so-subtlely presses the message that you are supposed to get married, and if you don’t, something is wrong with you. I believe that is both unfortunate and unfair.

 Jesus never married, nor did John the Baptist or Paul or most of the disciples. Jesus’ good friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were not married.

 In many churches, one of the most underrepresented segments of our society is singles. Singles may not feel welcome in many churches because they are viewed as mis-fits. Although people don’t ask out-loud, some wonder, “What’s wrong with you? Why aren’t you married?”

 Not all singles are the same. **Some are seasonally single.** They are young; they just haven’t met the right person yet. They have not yet arrived at the season of marriage. **Some are circumstantially single**. Maybe they are divorced or their mate died. Maybe they wan to be married again, but it hasn’t happened yet.

 Then, there are **those who are called to live a single life.** That is God’s will for them. Paul celebrates such people. Look at vv. 32-35, 38.

 Young people spend much time fantasizing about who they will marry. What will he or she look like? What qualities will this person have? How are we going to meet one another?

 I remember hearing a story about a large group of co-eds who were at a ministry function in a Christian school at the beginning of a new year. While addressing the group, the director said, “In a group like this, two of you might get married to one another and you haven’t even met yet.” At that point a young lady began waving her hand and said, “I’m over here.”

 The summer after my sophomore year in college, I attended a class at Falls Creek taught by Max Barnett, the long-time BSU director at OU. He was teaching the Book of 1 Corinthians. When he got to chapter 7, he said, “I think every single person should make a thorough study of this chapter before they decide to get married.”

 When I was a student at OBU I wrote a paper on celibacy. In that paper, I identified five difficulties that those who choose to remain single will face:

1. The Frustration of Sexual Expression.
2. The Absence of Intimacy.
3. The Risk of Loneliness.
4. The Renunciation of Parenting.
5. The Lack of Social Acceptance.

 Choosing to live a single life is not necessarily easy, but if Christ has chosen that for you, He will see you through.

 In that paper, I wrote:

 Celibacy is more than abstaining from sex . . . Celibacy involves abstaining from sex for the purpose of devoting oneself to the Kingdom of heaven . . . Celibacy then, is a vow not to marry and to abstain from sex for the purpose of devoting oneself fully to God. In light of this, celibacy is a distinctly Christian ethic.

 If a person views singleness as a curse or a burden to bear, he or she will never be satisfied, but if they can view singleness as a holy estate and an opportunity to be used of the Lord, then they can find great joy and fulfillment in life.

1. **WE CAN PROMOTE SEXUAL PURITY BY ADVOCATING MARRIAGE FOR MOST.**

 Singleness is certainly not for everybody. Just as some may be given a gift to remain celibate, Paul recognizes that some receive the gift to be married. Whatever gift you have been given, you need to embrace that gift. Look again at v. 7 and v. 9. You must never try to open a gift that is not yours.

 If a person lacks sexual self-control, and probably most of the people in the world do lack it, it is better for them to marry. That seems to be the point Paul was making as he started out this 7th chapter. Look at v. 2. He returns to that theme in v. 36.

 In his book, *Twelve Challenges Churches Face,* Mark Dever points out some of the reasons that sexual expression in marriage is right and good. He writes:

* Marriage is for partnership and procreation . . .
* Another reason sex has been given is for protection (from falling into impurity)
* Sex has also been given for pleasure.
* Another purpose if for the public good.
* Sex and marriage pictures God’s relationship with His people and Christ’s with His Church.

 James Merritt is a Southern Baptist pastor. He preached a message on the first seven verse of this chapter. He entitled his message, “Sex: Safe, Sound, and Super.” He said in his introduction:

 When you read the Song of Solomon and when you read our Scripture passage today, [1 Corinthians 7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians+7%3A1-7%3A40), God makes it very plain, and he doesn't apologize for it, that a married couple should have an X-rated sex life. The problem is that too many married couples have a G-rated sex life.

Listen to his conclusion:

 So, men, after you say, “I do,” you better continue to show your wife the affection and attention to begin with, and women, after you say, “I do,” you better be the one person your husband can always come to in an encouraging, loving, and positive way that will meet his sexual need.

 As Mr. Holmes used to say, “It really is elementary, dear Watson, it really is.” Here’s what God says about sex; it’s really simple. He says sexual purity before marriage; sexual practice after marriage; and sexual passion within marriage. God created sex; he’s the expert, not Hollywood. He knows it better than anybody in this room. God said that if you will practice those principles, you will experience the best sex that will be safe, it will be sound, it will be super.