



Sexual Integrity

OBEDIENCE OR MERE EXCELLENCE?

STEPHEN ARTERBURN

(2 Timothy 2:22)



Why is it so easy for people to compromise their standards of sexual sin and so difficult to firmly commit to obedience? Perhaps it is because people are used to compromise. Most people easily tolerate mixed standards of sexual purity because they tolerate mixed standards in other areas. If mixed standards are the rule, people are not motivated to single out sexual standards and maintain purity in that one area.

Sexual sin begins when people stop short of God's standard of sexual purity, which is complete obedience to His commands. God commands that sex be a part of a married relationship between a husband and a wife. People who obey that command have sexual integrity.

OBEDIENCE OR EXCELLENCE?

Normally, we might consider these two words to be synonymous. After all, if we are acting obediently, isn't that excellent? There is a difference, however. In business, the *pursuit of excellence* is considered to be good enough. Few businesses would try to be truly perfect, because true perfection is too costly. Businesses know it is enough to *seem* to be in pursuit of excellence. The "search for excellence" becomes a comfortable and profitable pit stop short of the price of perfection.

In the same way, Christians are tempted to stop short of perfection. Instead of truly being obedient, they are content to appear to be in pursuit of excellence. That way they can feel content that they are "trying," without the cost of perfect obedience. They can cross boundaries of sexual purity, becoming dangerously distinguished only by the fact that they are not involved in actual intercourse. Ironically, they consider themselves to be "obedient" because they have the appearance of excellence.

However, "excellence" in this sense is a mixed standard, and it is not good enough. It is not sexual integrity.

THE COST OF DISOBEDIENCE

When people's standards of sexual purity move closer to that of their peers, the result is distance from God. Christians are often indistinguishable from non-Christians—sharing the same activities and attitudes about premarital sex. Many Christian singles groups don't question men and women among them who are sexually active. Christian couples have also fallen short, reeling in the wake of adulterous affairs and marital separations. However, Scripture warns, "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting" (Eph. 5:3, 4).

THE COST OF OBEEDIENCE

Christians who live according to mixed standards may seem "good enough" to a depraved world. However, God's standard of perfection beckons Christians to go farther and demonstrate the cost of obedience in their lives.

For example, it costs a family to have regular worship and devotion times. However, those who seek obedience to God's

commands pay a price in their priorities and are rewarded by stability and purpose amid their frantic activities. In the same way, it costs something to insist that one's children practice modesty in their appearance and attitudes—it's easier to give in and avoid the battle. However, the family that invests in a framework for making moral decisions is prepared for the cost.

In the realm of sexual integrity, it costs something to control one's eyes, heart, and mind when lured by the temptations in magazine racks, movies, and video stores. God doesn't demand obedience in order to take the fun and thrill out of life. Instead, He knows that sexual purity is for our good and for the good of His kingdom. He wants His children to be "blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

Every believer's heart faces a daily spiritual battle for purity. The costs are real. Obedience is hard, requiring humility and meekness. Too many people refuse to commit to obedience because of the "unforeseen situations" they assume may try their attempted standards anyway.

Sexual impurity has become rampant in the church because people have ignored the costly work of obedience to God. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality. . . . For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (1 Thess. 4:3, 7). Christians have crafted an image and may even seem sexually pure, while permitting their eyes to roam when no one is around. It is easy to avoid the hard work of sexual purity! They have also ignored the cost of Christ's sacrifice on their behalf. Believers who truly comprehend the obedience of Christ—difficult obedience, in order to cleanse us from sin—should not even want to sin in His presence.

THE REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE

Recognizing the tolerance of sin in one's own life is the first step toward reaching the greater goal of true obedience. It costs something to learn about Christ's standards for living and even more to live like Him. However, the rewards for doing so are immeasurable, both for this life and the life to come. Sexual integrity brings great hope and joy. While a search for excellence or "how holy can I be" leaves one vulnerable to the dangerous snare of compromise, obedience builds greater hope for a growing faith. Instead of merely getting by with the pretension of "appearing" good enough, Christians who seek to obey God will find that His rewards far outweigh any of the costs.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of sexual integrity include:

- > Genesis 2:24
- > Proverbs 4:1-27; 5:18
- > Romans 7:13-25
- > 1 Corinthians 7:5; 10:13
- > Hebrews 4:12
- > James 4:7, 8

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on sexual integrity at 1 Corinthians 6:15 on page 1499. See also the personality profile of Ruth and Boaz on page 336.

own body. ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?* ²⁰For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body^a and in your spirit, which are God's.

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1 CORINTHIANS 6:20

band render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

⁵Do not deprive one another

except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶But I say this as a concession, not as

6:20 ^aNU-Text ends the verse at *body*.

PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE

7 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me:

¹It is good for a man not to touch a woman. ²Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ³Let the hus-

KEY PASSAGE

ONE FLESH

(6:15)



Sexual Integrity

Sex is more than a physical act. When God created sex, He said that in that moment, the two people "become one flesh" (6:16; Gen. 2:24). Sex is meant by God to be a holy union in which a man and a woman share a deep bond. But in the Corinthian culture, sex outside of marriage was not viewed as evil. It was even part of their "worship," as the temple of Aphrodite employed thousands of temple prostitutes. Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to understand that because they had become the body of Christ, they needed to separate themselves from all forms of sexual immorality. This did not mean that married couples should become celibate—sex itself is not evil, for God created it. It is people who pervert it. Instead, believers must practice sexual integrity. God's people must abstain from sex outside of marriage; but within the bonds of marriage, a husband and wife should be faithful, always seeking to lovingly meet each other's needs (7:2–5).

To Learn More: Turn to the article about sexual integrity on pages 1608, 1609. See also the personality profile of Ruth and Boaz on page 336.

SOUL NOTE



Premarital Purity (6:18–20) Often movies and television shows portray couples having sex outside of marriage as normal and common. Often people seem to have no concern that this is sin according to God. He does not ask believers to "flee sexual immorality" because He wants to ruin their fun. Sex was God's idea; He created it as a holy union that binds two people together. Experiencing that union with many different people cheapens what God intends as a lifelong bond between a husband and wife. Believers must keep their premarital relationships pure. But if they have not done so, they can begin anew, knowing that God will forgive past sins.

Topic: Premarital Relationships

dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

²²So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

RUTH MEETS BOAZ

2 There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. ²So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after *him* in whose sight I may find favor."

And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

³Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field *belonging* to Boaz, who *was* of the family of Elimelech.

⁴Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "The LORD *be* with you!"

And they answered him, "The LORD bless you!"

⁵Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman *is* this?"

⁶So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, "It *is* the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reap-

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Sexual Integrity

RUTH & BOAZ — SEXUAL INTEGRITY IN PREMARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

(RUTH 2-3)

The way in which a couple meets and the story of their courtship reveals much about their marriage prospects. Ruth and Boaz lived one of the Bible's most romantic love stories. As in every true love story, Ruth and Boaz had their share of sorrow, difficulty, adventure, and victory. Where fools rush in, Ruth and Boaz walked wisely.

Boaz met Ruth shortly after she arrived in Bethlehem with Naomi, her mother-in-law, who was returning home. Both women were widows. They were also friends. Naomi's God had become Ruth's. The lovely Moabitess graciously assumed the role of resourceful provider for the two women, never guessing what surprises God had in store.

Ruth showed up during the harvest of Boaz's fields, gleaning the leftovers to feed Naomi and herself. Boaz noticed her. A few tactful questions later, Boaz began to demonstrate special attention toward Ruth. He encouraged her to stay with his work crew. He informed her that she was under his guarantee of safety because of her special care for his relative Naomi.

During the harvest days, mutual respect and appreciation became special affection between Ruth and Boaz. Under Naomi's guidance, Ruth let Boaz know she was open to his role as kinsman-redeemer, meaning that he would marry her, care for her, and perhaps carry on the family line. Boaz praised her character and promised to take action. When it was all said and done, their marriage made them part of the ancestry of Jesus.

Sexual possibilities were undoubtedly part of Ruth and Boaz's story, but they did not use sex to determine their relationship. They are a romantic tribute to the power of sexual integrity before marriage.

To Learn More: Turn to the articles about sexual integrity on pages 1608, 1609 and premarital relationships on pages 338, 339. See also the key passage note on sexual integrity at 1 Corinthians 6:15 on page 1499, and the key passage note on premarital relationships at Amos 3:3 on page 1151.

seph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. ³And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority. ⁵So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, *that* the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. ⁶Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

⁷And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

⁸But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹*There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*"

¹⁰So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her or to be with her.

¹¹But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house *was* inside, ¹²that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. ¹³And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, ¹⁴that she called to the men of her house and spoke to

them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. ¹⁵And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside."

¹⁶So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. ¹⁷Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; ¹⁸so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

¹⁹So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant *did* to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused. ²⁰Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners *were* confined. And he was there in the prison. ²¹But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²²And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. ²³The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under Joseph's authority,^a because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made *it* prosper.

THE PRISONERS' DREAMS

40 It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. ²And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. ³So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where

^{39:23} ^aLiterally *his hand*

SOUL NOTE



Sometimes You've Got to Run! (39:7-12) Lust has no logic. Sometimes you can't talk someone out of doing wrong—you just have to get out of the way. Potiphar's wife presented Joseph a difficult dilemma. Giving in to temptation would offend his master; resisting it would offend his master's wife. Joseph knew only one answer to this moral challenge: View it from God's perspective. Thus he concluded that violating his sexual integrity would be a "great wickedness" and "sin against God." Sexual sin hurts one's relationship with God and can destroy relationships with others. Joseph realized that he had no choice but to run! **Topic: Sexual Integrity**

all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. ⁷For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given^a us His Holy Spirit.

A BROTHERLY AND ORDERLY LIFE

⁹But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; ¹¹that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

¹²that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing.

THE COMFORT OF CHRIST'S COMING

¹³But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.^a

¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until

^{4:8} ^aNU-Text reads *who also gives*. ^{4:14} ^aOr *those who through Jesus sleep*

KEY PASSAGE



Sexual Sin

FOR OUR OWN GOOD

(4:3-7)

The Bible is very clear about sexual sin. God created sex as a beautiful expression of love in marriage. Satan took that beauty and distorted it. Sexual sin encompasses a wide range of activities forbidden by God. No matter what society allows, believers must look to God for instruction in this serious matter. Christians need to avoid activities or thoughts that warp what God intended for building oneness in marriage. The Bible's statements concerning sexual sins are plentiful and plain:

- > *Adultery* (Ex. 20:14; Lev. 18:20; Prov. 6:32; Matt. 5:27, 28)
- > *Homosexuality* (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10)
- > *Incest* (Lev. 18:6-18; 20:11, 12, 17; Deut. 27:20, 22, 23)
- > *Bestiality* (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 18:23; 20:15, 16; Deut. 27:21)
- > *Lust* (Matt. 5:28; Rom. 13:13; 1 Thess. 4:5; James 1:14, 15; 1 Pet. 4:3)

Believers must have no part in sexual sin. God knows its power to destroy people. His commands are for our good.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about sexual sin on pages 1582, 1583. See also the personality profile of David and Bathsheba on page 400.

SOUL NOTE



Vessels of Honor (4:4) The words "each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor" refer to believers having sexual self-control. The standards of the Roman Empire were not much different from a lot of the world today: Sex was a form of entertainment; sexual activity between the unmarried was considered normal; even homosexuality was often accepted. But the Bible teaches sexual integrity. Sex is meant only for a husband and wife in the loving bonds of marriage. As believers we should uphold the beauty of sexual integrity, starting in our own lives. **Topic: Sexual Integrity**