

Positive Purity:

A Strategy for
Men that Play to Win

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Positive Purity

Many are writing excellent books in this decade to explain how to abstain from the things that bring impurity, and I have no desire to duplicate that good work. Instead I have been looking for a way to demonstrate the positive side of purity for my friends who are in discipleship with me, especially the guys in our men's ministry who are seriously committed to becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. I think we already realize that purity requires abstaining from the fleshly lusts which war against the soul, but I also want to challenge my friends to positively pursue the things that are pure. I believe that God can produce in us a thirst that will make purity natural for us (for us who have a new nature, that is). Just as a thirst for pure water is a great motivator and leads naturally to a distaste for mud, so a thirst for purity will quite naturally bring us to detest every form of sin.

When I was a junior varsity basketball player in high school our coach believed that the secret to winning on defense was to have an excellent offense. We drilled many defensive skills, but spent far more of our energy practicing offensive plays and learning how to keep the ball in our opponents' court for most of the game. He often quoted the dictum: "The secret to a good defense is a good offense." The truth is that in basketball you can never win by defensive strategy unless you are also scoring points on offense.

My prayer is that the men around me will know that purity is not primarily a defensive skill. It is not really a skill or a discipline at all; rather it is a spiritual thirst that we in our flesh have tried to quench with every form of slime and scum—and still we thirst. My friend, I am asking God to help you see from this booklet that His way is not to obsess about fleeing covetousness and lust but to actively pursue a positive purity.

Drink Deep

I hope that this short booklet has produced in you a thirst for purity of a positive kind. My goal has not really been to satisfy Christian men but merely to remind them of the existence of a source of pure satisfaction—Jesus Christ. Jesus made a promise to you and me when He said "those who thirst for righteousness shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6). He also pronounced a blessing that echoes down the ages: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." How pleased I would be to discover that God has used this booklet to bless men with a thirst for pure righteousness!

By now you realize that Jesus is the source for positive purity to quench our thirst, and His Spirit is the flowing spring bubbling up in our insides (John 7:37-39). When you are abiding in Christ, you are camped out beside the crystal cold pool of positive purity. While you drink of His Spirit you aren't thirsting for the praise of others. While you are finding your satisfaction in Him, the very idea of whoring after money or glossy photographs seems preposterous. Jesus lived for 33 years without money, without sex, and with as little public notice as possible...and Jesus is the happiest man who ever lived.

My friend, pursue this purity in the only place it can ever be found, so that you may attain to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding: to the knowledge of the mystery of God (both of the Father and of Christ) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2-3). Amen.

The humble man is a praying man, but also in an unexpected way he is a boasting man. Now here is the surprising fact of our nature: men were made to boast. The reason we can't stand it when somebody tries to be humble is that we know he is being false; we know he is boasting on the inside while he pretends to be humble. Positive purity does not pretend not to boast, rather purity makes its boast in the Lord. In the ninth chapter of Jeremiah the Lord instructs us not to boast about our wisdom or our physical strength or our worldly wealth, but that we should boast about our friendship with Him. When children boast about their fathers, it is touching and fitting—there is nothing about such childish boasts that is ugly. So when men have childlike faith enough to boast of their best Friend and to boast of their true Father, then they are behaving like pure men were intended to behave.

Does this mean that when a purely humble man is complimented on a good effort or an excellent achievement he should say something pious like, "O, I am nothing; give glory to God"? I certainly hope not! We should be pleased and happy that we have done something well and there is no reason to hide our pleasure in it. It is also appropriate to thank those who encourage us with their compliments. Generally those who are congratulating us know very well that God is the source of our strength, nevertheless it is proper for them to build up and affirm the hard work of another Christian. Don't ever rebuke a Christian for encouraging you, and don't worry that if you encourage another brother who is doing well, he may become conceited. God knows how to deal with pride and conceit in a guy, as you probably already know from bitter experience. When we finally grow up to be child-like men of God we will be able to receive encouragement from one another with delight and lift up even those good words as a sacrifice of praise to God.

Wanting What I Don't Have vs. Investing What I Do

Let's start with this idea of covetousness, since it is the easiest area of purity to understand. We know that it is displeasing to God if we covet more material things than He has given us. When I covet stuff I don't have, I am really saying to Him that I don't like the gifts He has given me or that the gifts He provides are not enough. Now, when people treat my gifts with this kind of disrespect I get angry, so it makes sense to me that a covetous mentality is offensive to God and will harm my relationship with Him.

The Scripture, however, makes me realize that covetousness is more than just disrespect for God's gifts to me; apparently God takes it very personally. In Colossians 3:5 we are commanded to put to death "covetousness which is idolatry." So here is my question: what does covetousness have to do with idolatry and why would the Bible draw such a clear connection between materialism and the worship of false gods?

Try to recall your feelings for the first automobile you ever owned. Do you remember how you longed for your own set of wheels, how you spent every dime you had to buy her, how you used to daydream about the ways you could customize and optimize the performance and look of your car? My first car was a 1968 Plymouth with a 318 engine, and until she broke my heart I always defended the 318 as the greatest powerplant every designed for a passenger car. Looking back over 25 years I can realize it was only a car, but back in those days it was my first love, and that teenage crush can snap back and bite me even today; here is why.

When I fixate on material things that I want, I am really worshiping those things: I meditate on them, I glorify them in my mind, I praise them to others (like I used to praise the Plymouth 318 V-8), and I make sacrifices for their sake. As long as there is any sensitivity left in me, the word of God will convict me about this, piercing to my heart and revealing my secret thoughts; I will come to realize that I am idolizing material things and trying to find my security in temporal wealth instead of in my Everlasting Father. If the

Holy Spirit ever feels that He has competition in my heart from any material thing, He will confront me with it—I will have to confess that I have committed idolatry, and He will insist that I put it to death.

Another problem with coveting more stuff is that it centers my mind on worldly and impermanent things. When my mind is occupied with materialism and worldly stuff, I have no time or mental energy for God. I am literally pre-occupied in that my mind is already so full of unimportant stuff that I have no space to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

But even though materialism is so dangerous, avoiding a covetous mind is still only a negative purity. The positive side of ridding my mind of materialism is investing myself in the Kingdom of God. Jesus stated this principle (Luke 12:34): “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Jesus was training His disciples to think with positive purity by investing their treasure in the direction that they wanted their hearts to follow.

I remember that before I had any money invested in the stock market I never paid any attention to the market reports on the news. But nowadays whenever I have anything in the market I listen to the reports with much keener interest. In the same way, those who are investing their wealth in

Food for Thought

What is God’s purpose for providing all of our possessions?

the markets, fashions and stuff of this world will spend most of their free time and energy thinking about the things of this world, but those disci-

ples of Jesus who are practicing a positive purity will spend most of their time and energy thinking about the things of the Kingdom of God. It just makes sense that we will give most thought to protecting and increasing our most treasured possessions. And this is exactly the way God wants us to be pre-occupied, because He says, “If you were raised [from the dead] with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is” and “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

vancement rather than to simply ask God for what we want. Of course, he also points out that some of the things we want are so selfish that we should be embarrassed to put those desires into the words of our prayers! There are two mutually exclusive ways to advance in life: we must either compete with one another so that *we* get ahead, or we must ask God for what is needed so that *His kingdom* can move forward.

We can make the choice for positive purity, and prayer to God will entirely displace pride and envy. Think about it; how prideful could a man be if he consistently cast himself upon God in prayer whenever he had a need and then praised Him and thanked Him for every victory? The Bible insists that at any given time we are either making friends with the world or we are making friends with God (James 4:4). If we are making friends with God and drawing near to Him, our need to get ahead of others will fade; if we are making friends with (networking and schmoozing) the world, we are making God our enemy and challenging Him to work against us; because it is simply God’s character to oppose the proud while He advances and promotes the humble man (James 4:6).

Do not imagine for a moment that this is something you will have to work at by your own efforts. It is not as though you are going to become humble by disciplining yourself to pray whenever you feel proud. God already did the hard part of displacing pride in your heart, when He “sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, ‘Abba, Father!’ (Galatians 4:6)” Now the Spirit of God in your heart wants to pray and wants to praise the Father; you have only to stop resisting Him.

Let me say again, the purely humble man is a man of prayer. Whenever he has a need his first thought is to tell his Father about it. Whenever he finds himself anxious or worried, he casts his cares upon God (I Peter 5:5-7). Whenever he experiences advancement, his first thought is to recognize the way that his Father has blessed him. Every experience and every crisis becomes an avenue to draw near to God and to either thank Him or to pray for His immediate help.

this experience was that I had to confess that some of their perceptions were right on the mark. But the worst part was that they were wrong in many of their suspicions, and I became very self-conscious for the next several months as I tried to discern my motives in every decision. For a while I am sure that I became more self-absorbed than ever as I tried not only to be humble but also not to offend others by appearing to be proud!

Trying to appear to others to be humble is not positive purity, not by any means. In fact, doing acts that appear humble is a form of hypocrisy that makes Jesus entirely fed up. He told us in His sermon on the mount that we must not do our “charitable deeds to be seen by men,” but that we

***In the presence of the Lord
Jesus Christ every knee bows***

should pray in secret and give to charity in secret and to fast before God in secret.

These acts of humble

service please God who sees us even in secret and promises to reward us (Matthew 6:1-18).

What is the positive side of avoiding pride and envy? First of all we must make a conscious decision to put our best Friend forward instead of trying to put ourselves (or a false image of ourselves) forward. A life that exalts Jesus Christ can never be prideful or envious because it is so full of the Lord and His joy that there is no room for self-consciousness. In the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ every knee bows and every tongue confesses His worthiness—a life lived in the presence of Jesus has neither time nor temptation to worship itself. As pure sunlight causes the moon and stars to fade into invisibility, so the pure presence of Jesus Christ in a man’s life causes all of his personal pursuits to lose their luster, to lose their attraction.

This principle is described in practical terms in the fourth chapter of James where pride and envy are contrasted with the life of prayer. James says (4:1-3) that all of our quarrels and fights can be traced back to the fact that we choose to envy one another and to scheme for our own ad-

Jesus’ Financial Plan

Regarding the relative value of investments, Jesus put His principle this way (Luke 12:15): “Guard against every form of greed, for not even when one is exceedingly rich does his life consist in his possessions.” The meaning of this proverb was clarified when Jesus told the story of a rich man who squandered his wealth by preserving his capital. He said the man was foolish because when his investments produced an unexpectedly good return, the rich man stored those investments up for protection and a material “nest egg.” Most financial advisers would tell you that this rich man was not a fool at all but a shrewd investor, however they would be flat wrong. Jesus pointed out that when the rich man died unexpectedly his investment was a total loss—he couldn’t take any of it with him!

The truly wise man does not store up his capital gains but uses financial gain and invests it for spiritual profit. Every disciple of Jesus is also a steward of the capital of the Kingdom of God; in other words, we have been given positions in management. Jesus promised His disciples blessing and reward if they would manage the resources of His kingdom wisely and unselfishly. He made it absolutely clear that the blessing was not only for the Twelve Disciples (Luke 12:42) but for every “faithful and sensible steward, whom the Master will place in charge of His servants to give them their rations;” when it comes time to reward that steward “He will put him in charge of all His possessions.” Jesus is not speaking only of financial resources but of time and energy and spiritual passion that His wise disciples invest in the household of God, the bride of Christ, the church whom He loves.

Positive purity does not merely involve defending ourselves against greed, but going on the offensive and investing everything we have in the kingdom of God in Christ Jesus. Anyone who takes ten minutes to consider will agree that worldly wealth is temporary and that “you can’t take it with you.” The remarkable truth that only the disciples of Jesus can know is that this temporary wealth can be invested

for a permanent return (Luke 12:33) and that it is possible to have financial security in this life without having to build bigger storage barns. “Your Father knows everything you need—seek for His kingdom and these things shall be added to you” (Luke 12:30-31).

But let me tell you plainly what positive purity is not; it is not a way to manipulate God or to justify yourself in comparison to others. The Pharisees thought that the positive side of avoiding covetousness was to become scrupulous at tithing. They felt that if they gave ten per cent of their income and the first return from each investment, that they could make themselves pure in God’s eyes and force Him to give them increased financial blessing. Instead of developing a pure relationship with God in which they truly trusted Him, they treated Him like an IRS tax collector: “Now that

***God always provides
for His own!***

I’ve paid you off, please just get the refund check in the mail on time and stay out of my business.” One thing we

can learn from the Pharisees is that a guy can tithe and give and seem generous while still being eaten up with greed on the inside.

Jesus never got one iota of pleasure from the careful accounting of the Pharisees; instead, He pointed out one anonymous widow as the true example of positive purity (Mark 12:41-44). The rich were dropping their silver coins into the temple treasury in a way that let everyone know that they were men of substance who were committed to doing their part to keep the temple operating, but Jesus was unimpressed by the show. Now when a poor widow came along and dropped in two cents, that moved Jesus to great satisfaction and pleasure, because He said, “she put in all she had, her whole livelihood!” She wasn’t depending on her puny resources, because she was casting herself entirely upon the faithfulness of God while she preferred to invest 100% of all she had in His kingdom. Jesus doesn’t tell us the end of the widow’s story, but I can guarantee she did not go hungry; God always provides for His own.

Another kind of impurity we are often keenly aware of (especially in other people) is pride and ambition. We know we should not think too highly of ourselves and that we really need more humility and less envy. James 3:16 reminds us that pride is the demonic seed of every kind of sin and that “where jealousy and strife exist, there is confusion and every evil thing.” We hate this kind of impurity in others and we suspect that they detest it in us; we know we have to get rid of it.

The discouraging thing about battling pride is that eliminating the sin is impossible unless something truly positive displaces it. Nothing is more disgusting than a proud man who is trying very hard not to be proud. He can’t seem to accept a sincere compliment with any pleasure, and you can tell he is being hypocritical when he praises others. You wish he would just let his proud heart show so the rest of us could tease him about it and help him get over it!

Here is what I have noticed about truly humble people: it is not that they speak in a lowly way about themselves; it is that they hardly seem to think about themselves at all! You

never find them trying to put their best foot forward. They seem to

***Nothing is more disgusting than a
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not to be proud.***

spend a minimum of time on introspection and are always thinking about the needs of others. When a humble athlete scores a difficult goal, he experiences pure joy because he added points for his team and can hardly wait to celebrate with his teammates. The prideful athlete either makes a spectacle of himself or else makes a show of pretended piety. Real humility doesn’t even seem to think twice about appearances.

One day I received a handwritten letter from a couple that were my partners in ministry at the time. In it they listed all of the things that they saw in me that (from their perspective) pointed to spiritual pride in my heart. The bad part of

even if you are single, your sexual parts are mighty for the worship of God?

The power for this positive purity does not come from trying harder; it comes from recognizing God's good gift and presenting it back to Him for His kingdom and glory. It comes from God's transforming work in our lives

The power for positive purity does not come from trying harder.

as He renews our minds. Choosing to glorify God by allowing the pressure to build

under control leaves us suffering temporary frustration but never needs to leave us lonely, since we are walking step by step with the Lord Jesus who knows exactly what it feels like. The unmarried apostle who wrote Romans 12:2 knows what he is talking about when he says that it is possible for God so to renew our minds that we will prove the will of God perfect, even under testing.

Your Turn...

Turn to Romans 12:1 and read what the Bible says about offering your body to God in worship. Do you believe that it is possible for your sexual behavior to be an offering of worship? How could you offer your sexual parts as a living sacrifice to God?

Suppose you have a friend who is separated from his wife and is going through the process of divorce, but meanwhile he has found a woman he would like to date. He says he doesn't feel he has the "gift of singleness." What advice will you give your friend?

If you were explaining sexual purity to your son or to a younger brother, what would you say are the three most important reasons for protecting your purity?

My Best Foot Forward or My Best Friend

What I desire for my own life and for my friends in discipleship is that we learn more and more to trust God for our material needs, and that we express this trust by investing more and more into the kingdom that will never end. Once we develop a taste for the pure water of stewardship for eternity, I don't think greed will have much traction or appeal in our lives.

Your Turn...

Could it be possible for you to serve two masters? Can you think of a way that you could maintain your devotion to God while at the same time making wealth your ambition?

What barrier is preventing you right now from being less of an owner and more of a steward?

Why is trust absolutely essential to financial purity?

Think of how many different ways God can and does provide for your family. List the provisions you have experienced in the past six weeks.

The Worship of the Flesh vs. Worship in the Spirit

One of my Bible college professors was teaching a group of us young men who were preparing for ministry the importance of resisting worldliness. His text was I John 2:16 which categorizes worldliness according to “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” I can hear his powerful voice booming down two decades, “Men, there are three categories of sin that will destroy you in ministry: beware of girls, gold and glory!” I think he meant that the lust of the flesh expressed in fornication will destroy the minister just as surely as covetousness does, and in fact, every fallen minister that I have heard of in the past twenty years has been brought down by either fornication, greed or a proud heart.

In the discipleship ministry of our local church we have found that many of our men are side-tracked and unable to go forward in their Christian life because of addictions to pornography and other forms of sexual sin. We have to tell them that the will of God for them is abstinence from every kind of sexual pursuit unless it is their own marriage. I Thessalonians 4:3 makes it clear that “the will of God for you is your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality.” Most Christians are aware that God has given explicit prohibitions against almost every sexual perversion (Leviticus 18): sex with a close relative, sex with somebody else’s spouse, homosexual relations, sex with an animal. These are all included in the minimal standard of purity in the Old Testament. Sexual purity is such an important matter in God’s eyes that His sentence for violating these standards was death (Lev. 20:10-16).

The New Testament cushions the fall while at the same time raising the bar. We are no longer called upon to put violators to death (God promises that He will judge them, Heb. 13:4), but I Thessalonians takes us to a higher level of responsibility. “Each of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust” (I Thess. 4: 4-5). Paul is using polite language to teach men in the churches a very bold point. The “vessel” he is talking

guy finishes fornicating or masturbating with pornography he always feels guilty, ashamed and generally demoralized. You can try every justification and excuse your actions as “only natural,” but it still leaves you dissipated and lonely.

Not only this, but true worship and fornication are entirely exclusive of one another. In idolatry and false worship, fornication is part of the worship experience and there are temple prostitutes available to facilitate the process. This is the satanic idea of great worship, and it appeals to many who do not know the Lord. But the true worship of Jesus cannot be joined in any way to fornication (I Corinthians 6:18-20):

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or 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? For you have been bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and spirit, which are God’s.

If you are glorifying God in your body, then you are not fornicating; if you are fornicating then you are not glorifying God.

Now let me be very clear about where the power for purity comes from. I hope no one reads this and thinks: “Now I am going from defense to offense. I used to not be able to walk away from pornography, but now I am just going to concentrate, concentrate, concentrate on worshipping God.” That just takes away an impossible negative burden and replaces it with an impossible positive one! The power for this very personal and intimate worship comes from God who has already taken the big step toward you in making peace through Christ Jesus. Now He wants you to “present your body a **living sacrifice** to Him” (Romans 12:1). Origen’s backyard surgery was a painful sacrifice, but not a **living** sacrifice. Disciple of Jesus, can you believe that God wants your whole body to worship Him, including your private parts? That if you would present your penis to be His, that He would make it clean and holy and acceptable? That

called The Song of Solomon to picturing the holiness of worship with the imagery of sexual pursuit.

If you are a single man, God has given you a position of honor in His service. Holiness in a single person is in many ways more pleasing and powerful than holiness in a married person. The married person's holiness is at least partially diluted because he shares himself with one other person: he has to always be thinking about how to please his wife, while the unmarried person's concern is only to please the Lord (I Corinthians 7:32-33). The pure holiness of an unmarried man is so precious to the Lord Jesus that His closest followers during the Tribulation period will all be virgin men "not defiled by women" (Revelation 14:4).

While worldly-minded people are always trying to set you up and introduce you to eligible women, the spiritual mind makes one emphatic statement: "If you are married to a wife, don't try to get out of your marriage; and if you are single, don't be looking for a wife (I Corinthians 7:27 in paraphrase)." This is an important reminder for every believer. When we have opportunities to encourage married men, let us exhort them to stay faithful to their wives no matter how difficult and headstrong they seem. And when we are encouraging single men, let us exhort them to stay single and

How does our culture influence us away from purity? How can we defend ourselves?

holy for as long as possible. For the unmarried disciple the only limitation on singleness is holiness: "if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry" (I Corinthians 7:9). A holy marriage pleases God, but disciple of Jesus, desire holiness above all, and only give up singleness when it becomes necessary in order to preserve holiness.

Positive purity results in such intimacy with the Lord Jesus that fornication in all its forms becomes unappealing. Let's admit it—nobody has ever truly worshiped the Lord Jesus and come away from the experience disheartened, shamed or depleted; on the other hand, two minutes after a

about is the male sexual organ, and he is saying we need to have it under control with holiness and honor rather than in the passion of lust.

Positive purity brings me to the conclusion that if I am to possess my vessel in holiness and honor, then my sexual organs themselves must be holy and honorable in God's eyes. A leader in the church many centuries ago, a man by the name of Origen, felt that he could solve his defensive problem by castrating himself. I do not recommend anyone to follow his example! Even if you could manage this feat of self-control, the absence of sexual hardware does not guarantee the presence of the holiness that God offers us.

In fact true holiness is enhanced by holy testicles. Read carefully the first two verses of Deuteronomy 23: "He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord. One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord..." This amazing passage tells us that both

fornication
(leading to illegitimacy) and
emasculatation

In fact, true holiness is enhanced by holy testicles.

prevented men in the Old Testament from approaching God in His tabernacle or in public worship. God loves eunuchs just as personally as He loves the sexually potent (the prophet Daniel was a eunuch whom God was especially close to), but when God chooses the men He desires to draw near Him for public worship, He looks for men who have sexual potency and who have it under control.

Think of the energy available in one teaspoon of gasoline. You know that even a very small amount of gasoline is extremely flammable and will burst into flames as soon as you get a match near it—it is a volatile substance, but as long as it is sitting in a teaspoon it is not very powerful. Now imagine that gasoline atomized and combined with oxygen; then confine it in the steel sleeve of an internal combustion engine. Then compress it to seven or eight times its normal density. Now we're talking about power! An engine fueled

by gasoline that is both pressurized and contained can take a man anywhere he wants to go and get him there quicker than a thoroughbred horse.

Pressure and containment are the same spiritual forces that are at work in our physical bodies. We feel the pressure building naturally over a 24- or 48-hour period, so that a sexually potent man always has this pressure at work in him or building in him. Do you find it instructive that before the Lord delivered the Law to the people, the men (both married and single) had to observe forty-eight hours of sexual abstinence (Exodus 19:15)? Not because marital relations would cause them to be defiled but because He wanted every man in that nation to be at full power (the purity of pressure and containment) when He came down to meet them. In the New Testament we see the same principle at work, because married men are commanded to have regular and frequent sexual relations with their wives with one exception—when they are

Food for Thought

Ever wonder why God chose circumcision for the sign of the Old Testament covenant? Seems like an odd sign since no one but your wife would ever see it. Why would God choose this intimate and masculine mark of belonging?

giving themselves to prayer and fasting, when they need to be at the height of both pressure and containment in their

worship of the Lord (I Cor. 7:3-5).

What is the positive purity principle that can take a man from defense to offense in his sexual relationships? I think it is summed up in the word “holiness,” one of the character qualities of God that He insists on passing on to His children: “You shall be holy for I am holy (Leviticus 19:2; 11:44b; 20:26).” In the New Testament also Peter exhorts us to “be holy in all conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy for I am holy’ (I Peter 1:15-16).” The Bible says that all of the discipline and temptation that God allows in our lives is for our personal profit, “so that we may be partakers of His holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

In my marriage all of my sexual being is holy to one other person, my wife. Sex is God’s good creation and has never been unclean in itself; the reason that sex is secret is only because it is holy to two people. While there were only two people in the world and while those people were holy, there was no need for clothing (Genesis 2:25). God’s intention for marriage is that “a man be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), so that their bodies are now no longer entirely private but are shared in common ***with just one other person***. But this is just a picture of a more important, more original and more fundamental holiness.

Some people seem to think that marriage is the fundamental human condi-

The reason that sex is secret is only because it is holy to two people.

tion and that everyone over the age of 21 should be married—this is a destructive and false notion. When Paul gives his most comprehensive instruction regarding marriage in Ephesians 5, he ends by saying about the “one flesh” relationship in marriage (5:32), “this mystery is great, but I am speaking about Christ and the church!” Marriage is only a picture of the primary and fundamental relationship: the marriage relationship was created in Genesis so that it could represent to us our relationship with God through Christ Jesus!

Why is holiness so valuable to us? Hebrews 12:14 counsels us to pursue holiness because “without it no one will see the Lord.” I am stepping out into a mystery that none of us can properly understand, but the witness of the Bible and the holy men of ancient times tells us that there is something very similar about the holy union with God in worship and the holy union of sex in marriage. It is simply that the marriage union has been given as a picture of what God desires with us, so that we can understand the desire of the Spirit He has caused to dwell in us, a Spirit that “yearns jealously” (James 4:5). Just as a husband yearns jealously over his wife, so the Lord is jealous over His people. Solomon describes this yearning, dedicating the whole book