

HOW CAN WE RESIST THE LURE OF SEXUAL SIN?

Can we find real intimacy and fulfillment by accepting the sexual ways of our times? Is what we call "making love" really love? Can "safe sex" be found by taking precautions? Are our sexual desires impossible to resist? Is there hope for sex-obsessed minds? Are we destined to repeat and repeat the choices that make us feel so alive one moment and so dead the next?

In the following pages, staff writer Kurt De Haan takes a look at the truths that need to replace the lies we sometimes believe about one of God's most beautiful and provocative gifts.

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A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

When some people think of sex, they think of irresistible urges, passion, and lingering guilt. Other people think of the magnetic attraction between a man and woman that can lead to a joyful spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy within marriage.

What makes the difference? What can make sex so bittersweet to one person and so delicious to another? It's a matter of perspective. You can view your sexuality as something that causes you to lose your self-control, or you can see it as something that holds great joy when kept in check.

People who come to Niagara Falls can experience this awesome natural wonder in two different ways. As newlyweds often do, they can walk along the side of the falls, feeling the mist and sensing the powerful energy of the roaring rapids and thundering cascades of water.

Another way to experience the falls, though, begins upstream. You could go swimming in the Niagara River far above the falls. You could allow yourself to be gently pulled along by the current, ignoring the danger signs, until you reach the point where you are caught in churning rapids and then carried over the falls, dropping 160 feet to the water and rocks below.

When it comes to our sexuality, too often we may feel as if we are caught in the strong current of our desires. We lost control somewhere along the way, and we end up doing what we later regret. Why is that? Why do we fail to turn back before we have gone too far? Could it be that we have waited until too late to look for signs of danger? Could it be that we overestimated our ability to resist temptation?

The writer of Proverbs 22:3 said that a wise person sees trouble coming and takes action to avoid it, but a foolish person continues on and suffers the consequences. And to people who were struggling with sexual temptation, the apostle Paul offered a plan of action to avoid trouble. He wrote, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

But how can we detect danger, and what does it mean to "walk in the Spirit"? That's what this booklet is all about. In the pages to follow we will try to see sex from God's perspective. We

will learn how to recognize the danger signs, and we will discover how we can gain wisdom and power from God to do what is right.

You may be facing some serious choices right now. Maybe you've "gone over the falls" several times. Maybe you're facing strong temptation. Perhaps you don't know what is right or you wonder why God has given certain guidelines for sex. By knowing what is true about sex, by learning the wisdom of God's commands, by choosing God's way, and by relying on His Spirit, we will do what is right, best, and most fulfilling when we find ourselves being lured by sexual desire.

THE LIES WE BELIEVE ABOUT SEX

Why do we so often make choices we later regret when it comes to dealing with our God-given sexual desires? It all begins with *lies*. We fail to make the right choices when we believe lies about the proper place and practice of sex.

Why don't we spot the errors? The lies we believe about sex aren't always all wrong. In fact, the most attractive ones are those that mix truth with error. Like a fishing lure that makes a trout think he's getting his favorite meal, lies disguise the "hooks" that can catch us.

Of course, we are a lot smarter than fish--usually. Sometimes we're not. Too often we would rather feel good than think. As a result, we make it more difficult to find the kind of real intimacy and pleasure our God made us to experience. Like a fish, we get caught on a line.

The basic lies we have to sort through to avoid getting hooked are nothing new to our generation. For example, the first-century followers of Christ in the seaport city of Thessalonica faced the same kinds of pressures and temptations we face today. In the apostle Paul's first letter to the new believers in that city, he spoke about the truths they needed to hear so they could avoid the hooks that would only hurt them and others. Paul wrote:

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 4:1-8).

Those words apply to us today as well. That's why in the pages to follow we will compare what 1 Thessalonians 4 says with the lies that we hear in our world today. These errors can be

grouped into three categories: [lies about standards](#), [lies about consequences](#), and [lies about solutions](#). With God's help we can sort out fact from fiction.

The Lies We Believe About Sex

LIES ABOUT STANDARDS

Murder, rape, bank robbery, shoplifting, and embezzlement are illegal--and for good reasons. It makes sense to have laws against vandalism, arson, selling cocaine, bribery of public officials, and spouse abuse. Even those annoying speed limits on the highways have a good purpose. We need laws that protect our fundamental human rights and prevent destructive and dangerous behavior.

But what about rules for sexual behavior? Is it really all that bad for a man in the privacy of his own home to gaze at the photos in a men's magazine or admire the beautiful bodies in a special swimsuit edition of a sports magazine? Is it all that wrong for a woman in a bad marriage to enjoy the intimate company of a man who is caring and compassionate? Is an unmarried young couple expected to hold off on having sex even though they think they love each other and have taken proper precautions against pregnancy or disease? Is sexual involvement between two consenting adults hurting anyone?

People have many different views about sexual standards. Before looking at what God has said, let's look at many of the common lies.

The Lies

- "I have to do what is right for me."
- "The Bible's standards are outdated."
- "God doesn't care what I do."
- "God is too loving to judge anyone."
- "God isn't against premarital sex, adultery, or homosexuality--only promiscuous sex."
- "Any sexual activity is okay if done in love."
- "Everyone else is doing it, so it's all right."
- "To stifle sexual activity is unnatural."
- "Lusting after someone isn't bad if you don't actually engage in sex with them."
- "Premarital sexual activity (such as petting and oral sex) is okay, but intercourse isn't."
- "Sexual experience before marriage will help people when they get married."

What is the truth about sexual standards?

Let's begin by looking for answers in 1 Thessalonians 4. The apostle Paul pointed to several truths that should help us.

1. Biblical standards of right and wrong come from God, not man. Paul told the new believers, "For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus" (v.2). His statements about how to live the Christian life were not his own ideas. Nor was

he merely reflecting his culture or what his good friends believed. The commands that Paul passed along were from God and were given through the authority that Jesus had given to him as an apostle. He spoke of the commands as "the will of God" (v.3). And again, in verse 8, he said that "he who rejects this does not reject man, but God."

This is where we need to feel the full weight of what is really happening when we choose to go our own way. It's easy to assume that what we do sexually really has nothing to do with our belief in God. It's easy to assume that we still love God and believe in Him even though we engage in sexual behavior that we know is not consistent with the standards of the Bible.

But this is where the lie needs to be exposed. We need to realize that we cannot reject God's law without rejecting Him and His lordship over our lives. His laws are expressions of His love and wisdom. When we try to separate sexual issues from our relationship with Him, we are attempting the impossible.

We must be very careful, therefore, not to dismiss parts of the Bible we don't agree with. Sexual standards in the Bible are consistent--whether those standards are in the Old Testament law or stated by Christ or written by New Testament authors. And biblical rules are not merely human opinions--they come from God Himself (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20,21).

Unfortunately, we all have struggles at this point because by nature we have an inner desire to go our own way, and the world around us seems to push us that same way. This problem has plagued all people since sin entered the human race (Rom. 1:18-32). Because we often would rather rule our own lives than to believe that God knows best, we don't want to submit to His high and demanding moral code.

2. God forbids sexual immorality. God doesn't have a "humans will be humans" attitude about sexual behavior. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul said, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality."

The Greek word translated "sexual immorality" is *porneia*, which Paul uses to refer to the full range of illicit sex outside of the one-man-with-one-woman marriage relationship. Sexual immorality therefore includes premarital sex, adultery, homosexual acts, prostitution, incest, rape, and even lust and obscene speech. (Leviticus 20 lists a wide variety of sexual acts that violate God's intent for our sexual expression.)

Why does God place these boundaries around sex? Imagine a river that flows peacefully through a city and farmlands. The river provides water for citizens and industry and helps to irrigate the farmers' crops. Sports fishermen enjoy catching the fish. Children enjoy swimming and playing in it. But then the rains come--lots of rain--so much rain that the river becomes a raging torrent. The swelling river surges over its banks and floods the city and farmland alike. Homes and businesses are damaged or destroyed, crops are washed away, and families mourn the drowning of a parent or a child.

In many ways, sex is like the river we just described. Within its God-ordained boundaries, it can be beautiful and provide joy for men and women. But when we make sinful choices, sex rages over its banks and creates havoc in our lives and in the lives of others.

God wants the best for us. His standards are meant to protect us, not to spoil our fun.

3. God designed sex to be a beautiful part of a marriage relationship. Paul spoke of using our bodies for holy and honorable purposes (1 Thess. 4:4). We use our sexuality in a holy and honorable way when we reserve sex for marriage. Hebrews 13:4 states, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure" (NIV). The Greek word translated *bed* refers to intercourse.

The relationship between husband and wife provides opportunity for the fulfillment of sexual desires. In fact, the apostle Paul said that a husband and wife owe it to each other to fulfill their partner's needs (1 Cor. 7:1-9). For a spouse to withhold sex from a mate invites temptation from Satan (v.5).

In the original creation account, God stated His intent for a man and woman to leave their parents and join together as "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). This one-flesh relationship was designed to involve physical and spiritual intimacy within a relationship of commitment to one another (Matt. 19:5,6). Too often, though, in our hunger for a close and loving relationship we may pursue sexual intimacy as a means to that end. And lust can blind us so that we end up pursuing sex for sex' sake without realizing the deep spiritual implications of such action (1 Cor. 6:15-20).

4. We cannot afford to look to the world for standards of behavior. The apostle said we are not to use our bodies "in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess. 4:5).

Our world has become obsessed with a perverted view of sex. Like all of God's good gifts, sex has been distorted by the effects of sin. Advertising, TV shows, movies, magazines, books, and everyday conversations in the workplace have blown sex way out of proportion--and out of bounds. And the frustrating part of lust is that it continually wants more and more. It has a way of overruling common sense and driving people to use others for their own sensual thrills (via magazines, videos, movies, music, and personal encounters).

The reason our world cannot offer us moral guidance is that it has forsaken the God of moral absolutes for gods of convenient excuses and immediate personal gratification. Romans 1 outlines the downward trend that occurs. And it happens over and over again as people rebel against God's standards, because His way gets in their way of what they think is best for themselves.

5. Purity is a matter of the heart. Paul warned against a lust-controlled life (1 Thess. 4:5). Jesus helped us to realize that though we may not have actually committed the act with our bodies, our minds may have indulged in illicit sex (Matt. 5:27-30).

At this point we need to make a distinction between legitimate sexual thoughts and lust. All of us think about sex; it's a part of human experience. What we must avoid, though, is to entertain and enjoy immoral thoughts. When our minds dwell on sexual acts that are outside of God's design, we've gone over the boundary into lust. Illicit sexual thoughts must be recognized for what they are, and then be rejected.

Proverbs 4:23 states, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (NIV). Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). Our thoughts are the starting points for our actions.

To compound the problem, messages of the heart can be misunderstood. You may know that lust and love are very different, but the distinction may not be so apparent when you're the one caught in the heat of a red-hot romance. A man and a woman might call their sexual intercourse "making love," but that doesn't make it love. It may be a severe case of self-centered desire.

Lust uses people and treats them as objects. It's not loving to take advantage of a person to fulfill your own sexual desires. Lust can blind a person to the need to follow God's standards for purity, and it can cause him to ignore the essential ingredient of a marriage commitment.

The world often feeds us the lie that we can have an unselfish and truly loving sexual relationship outside of marriage. Yet it is terribly self-centered and short-sighted to think that our personal sexual desires are more important than obeying God and doing what is best physically and spiritually, both now and eternally, for us and the other person.

6. Sex isn't everything. According to 1 Thessalonians 4, the more important values are pleasing God, pursuing holiness, treating our bodies with honor, and not wronging other people (vv.1-6). We certainly do not want to downplay the God-given importance of sex, but we also must not go to the extreme of making it a god. A person can live a happy and fulfilling life without sex.

Unfortunately, an unmarried person is often led to believe that he or she is less of a person without having had sex with someone. Marriage and sex can be so idolized that a single person feels left out. Yet the truth is that sex is only *part* of the overall marriage relationship. A good sex life does not guarantee marital happiness.

The apostle Paul certainly would not have written about the advantages of the single life in 1 Corinthians 7:32-40 if he had felt that sex was an indispensable part of our lives.

If we pursue sexual pleasure as if it were the path to happiness, we will always find that sex doesn't give us the expected fulfillment. Instead, we are likely to become addicted to enslaving passions and practices, and end up feeling a deep disappointment in our hearts. King Solomon, for example, did not find physical pleasures to be fulfilling in and of themselves (Eccl. 2).

The Lies We Believe About Sex

LIES ABOUT CONSEQUENCES

"Just because I said so, that's why!" How many times did you hear those words as you were growing up? Maybe your parents or teachers gave that answer to your persistent *why* because they didn't want to take the time to explain, or maybe because they knew you wouldn't see the wisdom of their point of view. In any case, you may have gotten the impression that they were trying to restrict you, not help you.

The statements of the Bible may sometimes seem to be rather arbitrary and unnecessarily restrictive. But as we will see, there is far more to the Bible than "just because I said so" answers. The truths of the Bible can protect us from the damaging effects of believing the lies.

The Lies

- "Sexual activity among consenting adults doesn't hurt anyone."
- "An affair can help, not hurt a marriage."
- "My sexual behavior doesn't have any effect on my usefulness for God."
- "I won't go too far."
- "I can get out of this relationship whenever I want."
- "I'll never get caught."
- "God is all-forgiving and He understands, so He won't punish me for the way I am."

What's the truth about the consequences of misdirected sexual desire?

The apostle Paul mentioned two major effects in his letter to the Thessalonians. He wrote, "That no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified" (1 Thess. 4:6). This one verse gives us two big reasons to avoid all forms of sexual immorality.

- Immorality produces victims.
- Immorality invites God's judgment. Let's study each of these ways our behavior affects us, others, and God.

1. Immorality produces victims. The people involved--even though they may be willing participants--are victims. They have been wronged, used, abused, deceived, and robbed.

For example, the couple who engage in premarital sex rob each other of their virginity and a clear conscience. They deprive each other of the joy of giving to their future marriage partner the precious gift of an intimacy that was intended to be preserved for marriage alone.

A person who commits adultery wrongs not only the sexual partner but also spouses and families. Contrary to the myth that a secret affair can strengthen a marriage, adultery does nothing but eat away at trust and intimacy.

A man who views pornography wrongs others by seeing them as sex objects instead of people of God-given value. His purchases of sexually explicit material encourage the exploitation of women. If he's married, he deprives himself and his wife of fulfilling sexual experience because he compares her to the near-perfect beauties in the magazines and videos. If he's single, he fills his mind with lust that compels him to mistreat the women he dates.

A person who combines fantasizing with compulsive masturbation deprives himself/herself of a clear conscience, fails to deal with the real world, and lessens the enjoyment of proper sex.

A man or woman who encourages another person to engage in a homosexual act helps to produce guilt, develop a twisted sense of sexual pleasure, and encourage a lifestyle that contradicts God's design for male and female.

Proverbs 5 through 7 describes several ways immorality victimizes people. It produces death (5:5), loss of honor (v.9), regret (vv.11-13), misplaced loyalty (vv.15-20), and it reduces a person's value to that of a piece of bread (6:26).

For example, King David's sin with Bathsheba produced several victims: David himself, as he became trapped in his own guilt; Bathsheba, as she was taken from her husband; Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, as he was killed by David's orders; the baby, who died; and the Lord, as the heathen used the incident to blaspheme Him (2 Sam. 11,12).

2. Immorality invites God's judgment. Illicit sex not only produces victims, but it also insults God. First Thessalonians 4:6 states that "the Lord is the avenger" when people are victimized by immorality.

God does not take our sin lightly. He sees clearly the damage that we are doing to ourselves and to one another. He knows that because we reap what we sow, no one gets away with anything. Galatians 6:7 states, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." We can be sure that either in this life or the life to come, God's justice will be perfectly executed. That's sobering.

How does God deal with those who commit immoral acts? From the Bible and practical experience we see several methods God may use to execute His justice:

- the plague of a guilty conscience
- painful memories
- sickness and sexually transmitted diseases
- death
- imprisonment for sex crimes
- loss of friends and family relationships
- loss of ministry usefulness for God
- loss of rewards in heaven

In the aftermath of his sin with Bathsheba, even though the Lord forgave David when he repented, judgment still followed (2 Sam. 11,12). God said that during David's rule the nation would always be at war, his own family would rebel against him, his wives would be taken and defiled, and the child who was conceived through the adultery would die (2 Sam. 12:9-14). This does not mean that this is always how God judges adultery, but in David's case, perhaps because of his leadership role, the Lord took this course of action.

In Genesis 39 we read about a young man named Joseph who resisted temptation because he feared God and the consequences of displeasing Him more than he feared people. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). In the short term, Joseph's life became miserable because Potiphar's wife was furious and had him falsely imprisoned for attempted rape. But Joseph had a clear conscience and experienced God's blessing in prison and after his release (Gen. 39-50).

Most of us remember Sodom and Gomorrah, two towns whose citizens were notoriously immoral. God destroyed them with fire (Gen. 19).

The apostle Paul spoke of keeping his body under control, lest he would become disqualified for the prize of faithful service (1 Cor. 9:27). And he wrote to Timothy that a person who wants to be used of God must be purified (2 Tim. 2:21).

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote that God disciplines His children (12:1-11). We can be sure that if we fall into sin He will take action to confront us with the awfulness of it.

Why does God want you and me to be pure? Here's a partial listing that includes some of the above points. Can you think of other reasons?

- to bring honor to God
- to please God
- to help and not hurt people
- to honor our wife/husband
- to protect the church
- to keep us from becoming victims
- to reflect God's goodness

- to show a proper understanding of sin
- to make us useful for His service
- to protect our future happiness

What this should tell us is that God's rules are for our best interest. His standards show His love for us, and help us to show our love for others. Sex in the right setting results in joy. In the wrong setting, it produces pain.

The Lies We Believe About Sex

LIES ABOUT SOLUTIONS

If a water pipe under your kitchen sink were leaking, what would you do? Put a bucket under it? Ask the TV repairman for advice? Try to fix it with a band-aid? Ignore it and hope it will go away? Wait until it begins to flow out into the kitchen and down the hall? Find another place to live? File a lawsuit against the pipe manufacturer? Complain to your legislator?

The above solutions aren't realistic--in fact they're pretty stupid. Yet we often try to deal with sexual tensions and problems in much the same way. We look for and settle for answers that don't really get at the root problem. And sometimes we even become deceived by the lies about the solutions to our sexual needs and problems.

The Lies

- "The answer is to just say no."
- "It's up to God to get rid of my feelings and break my habits."
- "I just need to try harder to be holy."
- "God can't do anything about my problem--it's up to me."
- "I need to deny my sexual feelings and pretend they're not there."
- "Satan has nothing to do with my problem, so I don't have to deal with him to resolve it."
- "Satan's lures are too powerful to resist."
- "I'm too weak (my flesh is too strong). I can't fight the constant pressure from the world. God understands that."
- "No one else is like me or experiencing what I am experiencing."
- "The solution is more education and ridding ourselves of sexual superstition."
- "I know when to stop. I can stop anytime."
- "I don't need anyone else to help me to overcome my problems."
- "The devil made me do it."
- "God made me this way. Why fight it?"
- "My needs are stronger than other people's."
- "I'm a victim of my environment."

- "God can never forgive me."
- "God will immediately remove all illicit sexual desires from my life if I ask Him to."

What is the truth about finding solutions to regaining and retaining sexual purity?

The apostle Paul pointed us in the right direction when he wrote, "For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 4:7,8). These verses give us two parts of the answer. In essence he tells us:

- Remember your purpose.
- Remember who lives in you.

1. Remember your purpose. "God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (v.7). When God sent His Son to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin and to free us from its power, He never intended for us to continue to sin. (Read Romans 6:1-14 and 1 John 1,2).

It would be unthinkable to tear down a condemned house, lay a solid foundation, and then build a house that looks good on one side but resembles a shack on the other. So too, it is illogical for a follower of Christ to use his life for both pure and impure purposes.

We have been set free from slavery to sin (Rom. 6:19-23). Why would we voluntarily choose to live in bondage to self-destructive behavior?

The writer of Hebrews 12:1,2 reminded us of the goal we must keep in mind and how that goal should affect our behavior. He said, ". . . let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." From these verses we can come up with four helpful reminders.

- Sin weighs down, so throw it off.
- Sin ensnares, so watch out for its traps.
- Jesus is your example, so follow Him.
- Endurance results in reward, so keep on!

God has transformed every believer into a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Because of what Jesus did for us, we have been declared right with God, free from any impurity that could keep us from heaven (vv.17-21). We are now called to be God's representatives in this world and to bring others to faith in Christ. How can we do that if we allow sexual impurity to contradict our message?

Jesus refers to us as salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Salt that becomes contaminated is worthless; a lamp that is hidden under a bowl cannot give light.

We are to be different, separate from the world, not part of it (1 John 2:15-17). Although we must live among nonbelievers, we must not adopt the world's view of life and sexuality.

Above all else, the purpose of our salvation is for us to know God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said in a prayer, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). And the apostle Paul could say of the accomplishments of his life, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8 NIV). The consuming passion of Paul's life was to know Christ better and to be more and more like Him: "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection" (v.10 NIV). If we have that kind of desire to know Him, it will crowd out other illicit desires.

A recognition of God's goal for our lives should help us to view temptations and sexual purity in the right light. And once we do, we will recognize that we need a lot of help to reach the goal of Christlikeness. In the next section we will discover where we can find that help to resist the lure of sexual sin.

2. Remember who lives in you. God "has also given us His Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 4:8).

R. C. Sproul, in his book *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit*, writes, ". . . the *Holy* in His name calls attention to the focal point of His work in the economy (plan) of redemption. The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier. He is the One who applies the work of Christ to our lives by working in us to bring us to full conformity and the image of Christ" (p.115).

God gave us the Holy Spirit when we placed our faith in Jesus Christ and accepted God's gift of eternal life (John 3; Rom. 8:9-17; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 John 4:13). Our bodies are now the dwelling place of the Spirit of God.

The apostle Paul asked, "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?" (1 Cor. 6:19). He specifically warned that because we are spiritually united to Christ, it's unthinkable to use a body indwelt by Him to unite sexually with a prostitute (vv.15,17). The use of our bodies in a way that glorifies God (v.20) rules out any immoral practices.

The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives accomplishes more than identifying us with Christ. Not only does the Spirit give us spiritual life when we are born again (John 3), but He also works to conform us to the likeness of Christ. We need the help of the Spirit if we are to break the grip of lust, run from temptation, experience release from a sordid past, tear away from an immoral relationship, and maintain sexual purity. He is our divine Helper (John 14:16,17; 16:7-14).

But how do we experience the empowering of the Holy Spirit? Do we gain holiness in our day-by-day life merely by a one-time prayer? Does God zap us so we don't feel any more immoral urges? The truth of the matter is this: We live in a corrupt world that is

hostile to purity, we possess a body with fleshly desires, and we are engaged in spiritual warfare against the devious forces of Satan (Eph. 6:12). To succeed in the fight against temptation we must actively cooperate with God's Spirit. We cannot win by being passive. The Bible not only talks about the work of God in us, but it also speaks of the actions we must take to be holy.

In Romans 6, Paul wrote, "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (vv.11-13). We must want to side with God and do what is right. We must take steps of faith and express allegiance to God's standards of holiness. We must reject Satan and his lies about sex.

God's Spirit will begin to work in us when we realize our desperate need of Him. That's what true faith is all about. Just as we received the gift of salvation by faith, so now we must continue to live by faith in dependence on the Spirit (Gal. 3:2,3; 5:16; Col. 2:6). Faith is dependence on the strength of our almighty God. When we exercise faith and give our bodies to God (Rom. 6:13), the Holy Spirit works in us to produce purity and holiness. The apostle Paul said, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

What Jesus taught in the Beatitudes sums up much of what we've been talking about (see Matt. 5:1-10). He said that the kind of people who enjoy God's approval are those who are poor in spirit (realizing their spiritual bankruptcy and their need of God's mercy and grace), those who mourn (recognizing sin's awfulness), those who are meek (self-controlled), those who hunger and thirst to be right with God (focusing on wanting to please God), those who are merciful (reflecting God's mercy), those who are pure in heart (single-minded in purpose), those who are peacemakers (mirroring peace with God), and those who are suffering persecution because they have decided to do what is right.

Perhaps one more analogy will help us to see the urgency of taking action, no matter what the cost. A gentle river flows through the center of the city where I live. Fishermen claim their favorite places along its banks and others wade out into the shallow rapids below a short dam. The usually picturesque and tranquil scene, however, turns ugly whenever a heavy rainfall hits. Because of rapid city growth and a drainage system that combines street drains and sewer pipes, the water filtration plant can't handle the increased volume during a heavy rainstorm. As a result, the river becomes an open sewer. A warning goes out to the fishermen and to towns downstream.

The problem won't go away just by ignoring it. Patching up the current system won't help either. What is needed is a whole new approach, an expensive alternative to the current method.

Our battles with sexual purity may be like that water filtration plant. Things work well unless a strong temptation comes along, and then all sorts of bad thoughts and actions flow out of our lives. We need more than a quick fix. We need radical heart surgery.

In this booklet we have emphasized the truths of God's Word--truths about God's standards, truths about the consequences of immorality, and truths about how to attain sexual purity. It is our prayer that you will make a new commitment to seek God, to know Him better, and to walk in newness of life in Jesus Christ.

In this life, you and I will continue to have battles with temptation. We will not always win because we will in some way believe a lie. But the good news is that God wants to forgive us and help us to grow more and more Christlike. It's a process. But our goal is to know Christ and to be more like Him every day of our lives, until we see Him face to face.

The following pages offer practical steps you can take to become more like Him.

STEPS TO FULFILLMENT

How can you find forgiveness, deliverance from sinful thoughts and practices, resist temptation, and develop holy habits so you will please God with your sexuality? The Bible offers several important truths to help.

1. God made you as a sexual person (Gen. 1:27). Recognize sexual desire as being a wonderful God-given fact of life. But also realize that how you respond to sexual desire shows whether you have chosen to follow God's route to fulfillment or your own (Gal. 5:16-19).
2. Think about what is really going on in your heart when you choose a form of sexual expression that God has forbidden. Admit that in rejecting God's ways you have actually rejected God for the sake of being able to have immediate, though short-lived, sexual pleasure. Confess that you have been pursuing your own selfish gratification, and accept His forgiveness (Heb. 10:22; 1 John 1:9).
3. Fill your mind with God's thoughts by knowing what the Bible says (Ps. 119:11). Remember that when Jesus faced temptation He chose to call on the words of Scripture (Matt. 4:1-11). The written Word of God is the "sword of the Spirit," one of our defenses against Satan's attempts to harm us (Eph. 6:17).
4. Ask for and rely on God's help (Matt. 6:13; 7:7-11; Luke 18:1; 22:40; Rom. 8:26,27). Don't trust your own ability to resist temptation (Heb. 4:16). Discover that self-control is found by choosing to let the Spirit of God control you (Eph. 5:18).
5. Realize that faith in the Lord may mean a willingness to experience discomfort for a while rather than to enjoy immediate but short-lived pleasure (Gen. 39; Heb. 11:25).

6. Realize that God has provided a way for you to escape every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). Look for it and take that route!
7. Keep in mind that real love will not allow you to fulfill your sexual desires at the expense of others (1 Cor. 13:4-7; 1 Thess. 4:6).
8. Don't put yourself in situations where you know temptation will be great. Don't ever plan on sinning or making it easy to fall (Rom. 13:14).
9. Seek the help and encouragement of other believers who can support you in your desire to be faithful to the Lord (Heb. 10:24,25; James 5:16).
10. Don't become complacent or overconfident when you have a victory over sinful desires. Always be on guard (1 Cor. 10:12).
11. Take radical action against impurity. Don't toy with it and take halfway measures (Matt. 5:27-30). Think of what encourages lust or makes indulging in immorality so convenient, and then change your patterns of behavior.
12. Keep your eyes on the example of Jesus (Heb. 3:1; 12:2-4). Believe that in time, choosing His ways will enable you to see the wisdom of His point of view.
13. Develop a close relationship to Jesus, and He will produce holiness in you (John 15:1-17).

FINDING THE TRUTHS

This four-part study is intended for either personal or group use. The questions are offered as thought or discussion starters as you study the Bible.

STUDY #1: PURITY OF THE MIND AND BODY

Purity of the Mind

- Prov. 4:23--Why is heart purity important?
 Matt. 5:27,28--Why is lust so bad?
 Matt. 15:10-20--What makes a person unclean?
 Rom. 8:5--What are "things of the Spirit"?
 Eph. 4:17-24--How do you gain a new mind?
 Phil. 4:8--What are good thoughts?

Purity of the Body

- Lev. 11:44,45--Why does God demand purity?
 Rom. 6:11-19--Whose slave should you be? Why?
 1 Cor. 6:13-20; Eph. 5:3-7--Why not indulge?
 1 Cor. 9:27--What did Paul do?
 Col. 3:5-10--What changes should occur? Why?

STUDY #2: PURITY TESTED AND MAINTAINED

Purity Tested

Gen. 39--How did Joseph respond?
Prov. 15:3,11--Does it matter that God sees?
Matt. 4:1-11--What can you learn from Jesus?
1 Cor. 10:12,13--What hope is offered?
James 1:13-15--What tempts us?

Purity Maintained

Prov. 4:14,15--How do friends influence us?
Prov. 7:1-5--What will keep us from sin?
Gal. 5:16--How do we "walk in the Spirit"?
Eph. 6:10-18--What are God's resources?
Heb. 4:15,16--How do these truths help?
1 Pet. 1:13-21--How are we to be different?

STUDY #3: PURITY LOST AND FOUND

Purity Lost

2 Sam. 11:1-5--How did lust lead to sin?
Prov. 7:22-27; 9:17,18--What are sin's results?
Rom. 1:18-25--How is purity lost?
Rom. 1:26,27--What penalties are involved?
Rom. 1:28-32--Why are people insensitive to sin?
1 Cor. 5:9-13--How are we to treat sinners?

Purity Found

Ps. 32:1-5--How did David find purity?
Ps. 51--What can you learn about confession?
Acts 10:39-43--Why does God forgive us?
Gal. 6:1--How do you restore a fallen one?
James 4:8-10--How can you find purity?
1 John 1:9--What does God promise to do?

STUDY #4: PURITY IN MARRIAGE/SINGLENESS

Purity in Marriage

Gen. 2:24,25--What was God's original intent?
Ex. 20:14--Why was this a command?
Lev. 20:7-10--Why did God condemn adultery?
Prov. 5--What is contrasted?
1 Cor. 7:3-5--What was to be taught?
Heb. 13:4--What should be our attitude?

Purity in Singleness

Ps. 119:9-16--How can you purify your life?

Rom. 13:14--What mistake is warned about?

1 Cor. 7:32-35--Why choose singleness?

1 Cor. 9:24-27--Why have self-control?

1 Thess. 4:3-8--What is God's will?

2 Tim. 2:22--What must you do when tempted?

PURE AND SUPERNATURAL

The words *pure and natural* may be appropriate to put on a bottle of crystal-clear spring water, but it would be false advertising for you or me to wear that label. Sexual purity isn't natural. It occurs only by God's cleansing process; and we won't stay pure without filtering out the lies about sex.

What about you? Are you sexually pure? Are you dealing with sin in your life, confessing it, and calling on God to help you make choices daily that will cleanse your mind and your life of impurity? Are you immersed in the truths of God's Word so that you can detect and reject Satan's lies?

If not, choose to follow God's standards. Recognize the deceitfulness of sin. Find a trusted and godly friend who can help you. Most of all, cultivate your relationship with God. Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Learn that God will fill you with joy as you live with and for Him.

Perhaps, though, you are bound by the guilt of your past. If so, remember, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). God will purify you if you will ask.

Jesus died on the cross for your sins--all of them. He allowed Himself to be bound to a cross so you could be free. Believe the truth, put your faith in Christ, live in moment-by-moment dependence on Him, and experience supernatural purity.