



3

MORAL PURITY: A MEASURE OF OUR CLEANSING AND RESTORATION FROM SIN

Pavel was an elite member of the Russian mafia. He was a highly educated economist who had entered the business world during the restructuring in 1989 and battled his way into prosperity. His holdings included exclusive retail outlets, banking, timber, and other asset-rich businesses, and he had surrounded himself with bright young men to manage his interests. Although he was an articulate, impeccably dressed gentleman in every sense of the word, he was also a tough-minded strategist who knew how to take what he wanted and defend what he had. His private security force of three hundred loyal, experienced warriors provided him with a threatening advantage over anyone who might want to challenge his rights. He was the epitome of the “Godfather” with powerful men from around the world seeking his favor.

Through a series of providential events we met and instantly became friends, meeting for dinner almost every time I visited St. Petersburg. We often talked for hours and I had many opportunities to share my personal testimony. He was an avowed atheist but was not offended by my faith. In fact, he was eager to know more about the motivations that enabled me to switch back and forth between my work in the U.S. and my humanitarian endeavors. We also discussed the problems he was facing in his legitimate businesses

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

and the strategies he was developing to solve them. Our conversations invariably turned to faith, and the Lord had urged me to stay in the relationship, freely sharing my insights and politely refusing anything in return but dinner and fellowship.

Money and power can be very seductive, and Pavel had plenty of both, but over time he became bored with his lifestyle. As he began to accept the existence of a living God who loved him, he also began to develop a moral conscience. He became concerned about the poor and actually created businesses to employ them. He also provided support for widows and orphans and others who had needs. And he had begun to pray. Pavel soon discovered that he had a serious problem. He loved learning about God, however, the more he believed in Him, the more aware he became of his own immorality. He could see that his growing faith was on a collision course with his whole philosophy of life, but did he dare make a complete commitment to faith in Christ? Could he? These were questions that wrenched his soul.

I challenged Pavel to test the Lord in some practical way. I knew that he needed to be certain he was dealing with a powerful God that he could trust and rely upon before he could yield to Him. It would be difficult for any man in his position to believe that a life of moral purity was better than his own, so I encouraged him to ask God for help that no one else could provide.

On one of my visits he greeted me with a big smile and said, "I did it! I made a deal with God!" He had two businesses he had been trying to sell, but none of his prospects had both the money and specialized knowledge needed to become serious buyers. He said he had just about decided to write them off as losses when an interesting idea came to him. Why not test God in the matter. He would ask God to bring him cash buyers. The market conditions made this humanly impossible, so in Pavel's mind, this would be a reasonable test. In his prayer, he promised to contribute every ruble from the sale to a group of pensioners who had been guaranteed dividends in one of his earlier ventures. The amount he would clear would equal what was owed. God was ready and waiting. He received cash deals for both businesses in only two weeks!

MORAL PURITY

The Lord had met Pavel at his point of faith. He had mercifully presented His credentials as the only true God in a way Pavel could see and understand. When Pavel paid off his debtors with the proceeds of the sale, he was acknowledging God's superiority, but this was only the minimum qualification to continue the relationship. It then became his responsibility to believe and obey all of God's commands, not just the ones he thought he liked. To some degree, this is the way we all begin our life with the Lord as He reaches out to us in mercy to help us understand His will. We must then be prepared to completely surrender our will to Him, knowing that He is a jealous God who expects to be obeyed.

Moral purity is a measure of our cleansing and restoration from sin. It is relative to each person's obedience to the Lord and the measure of grace God has given him. Although we may be well aware of impure behaviors in our life, changing or eliminating the motivation behind them requires some effort. There are often sinful causes hidden away in our hearts that have to be uncovered and revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. Once we see them clearly, we must be ready to repent, forgive anyone associated with our sin, and reject the behavior from our lives.

The success we achieve in reaching moral purity is related to our determination to explore the truth about ourselves. As we examine the areas of our life that have been held captive by sin and yield them to the Holy Spirit, we will face obstacles. But to a follower of Christ, the challenges of this kind of spiritual journey are only indicators of the great rewards at its end. As the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 2:12-16,

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

In Matthew 18:3-4 Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” For a long time, this Scripture was perplexing to me. I could not figure out how to be humble and childlike, and still maintain the toughness I thought I needed to carry out my responsibilities at home and at work. With other Scriptures calling me to maturity, I was confused about how to obey what the Lord was saying. Then I found 1 Corinthians 14:20, which says, “Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.” And Matthew 10:16 (NAS) which says, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves.” The balance of what He’s asking us to do finally became clear to me. As children of God, we are to pursue moral purity until we attain the powerful combination of childlike innocence and humility along with mature thinking. We are not to be ignorant, but innocent and unyielding to sin. That means we can enjoy our life and work without having to experience the tormenting thoughts, mental images, or guilt associated with impurity. We can be prosperous without being greedy, enjoy sex without being lustful, and have a successful career without being a power seeker or hurting others.

We live in a crooked and depraved generation, where one person’s purity is considered by another as fanaticism. But for the man who wants to please the Lord, seeking moral purity is not an option. The only question is how much each man will sacrifice to pursue it. Like the pioneers who crossed the American frontier, traveling across the western plains only to wearily face the imposing mountains of the continental divide, everyone must make a decision—will he settle or push on. The answer to that question depends upon a man’s evaluation of what is important in his life. There will always be men who will settle east of the mountains, satisfied that they don’t use profanity or steal from their boss. But others will push up and over the mountain, fighting for every inch of ground. They will find freedom—a childlike innocence and the favor of God they could never have imagined or even thought possible. “With men it is

MORAL PURITY

impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27 NAS).

The journey to moral purity is a pilgrimage to healing and wholeness. It begins as we implement spiritual disciplines into our daily lives and eliminate the oppression that is produced when our appetites are unrestrained. To properly evaluate the purity of our life, we must compare ourselves with the Word of God and subject our behaviors to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 10:12 (NAS) says that when people “measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.” Determining what needs to be changed and how much, is the Lord’s choice. Then we must exercise our will to obey, realizing that it is “by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9 NAS).

The Apostle Paul makes the relationship between grace and obedience very clear. In Romans 6:1-4 (NAS), he says,

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

I have especially enjoyed being a part of baptismal services over the years because of the opportunity it gives a new believer to obey the Lord in something so simple, yet profound. When we are baptized we identify with Christ in His death, setting our will against sin; His burial, allowing us to put away our old life by faith; and His resurrection, being raised in the power of His Spirit to do things differently. It is one of many steps of faith that a believer must take in following Christ. Because it is so simple, its importance is often missed by men whose concepts of power are worldly.

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

In 2 Kings 5:1-17, the story of Naaman demonstrates how easily man's misplaced perceptions can complicate things and cause us to overlook the power of simple obedience.

Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy." As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel" (vss. 1-8).

This is a typical mistake made by men. We often try to acquire God's power or favor in our lives by using formal channels of contact or influence, instead of pursuing the Lord directly and on His own terms. Or we think of it as only a business deal. God wants something and we want something, so we exchange what He wants for what we want—nice, clean, business-like, and no relationship

MORAL PURITY

required. Here, Naaman was focused only on getting what he wanted through the means he was accustomed to using. It could have been a dead end, had the Lord not caused Elisha to hear of his problem.

So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage (vss. 9-12).

Strike two. Naaman again misses the point. Receiving God's blessings and grace is dependent on our doing what He expects, not on His doing what we might expect. Elisha did not bring attention to himself as God's prophet, but properly fulfilled his duty by sending Naaman a simple directive from the Lord that required faith and obedience.

Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy (vss. 13-14).

When Naaman obeyed the simple command of the Lord, he received a miracle. I have seen this principle work time and time again as God deals with men's pride and draws them to Himself in simple obedience. When we do things by faith, in obedience to the Word of God, depending only on His grace, things happen.

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.” The prophet answered, “As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused (vss. 15-16).

Elisha wisely refused to confirm or reinforce Naaman’s worldly perceptions of power, even in Naaman’s sincere excitement about his healing. His refusal left Naaman in the position of not being able to relate any story but one of his obedience to the Word of the Lord. He did Naaman a great favor, because like most men, Naaman wrongly perceived that God might appreciate a sacrifice of some kind, when what He really wanted was further obedience.

“If you will not,” said Naaman, “please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord” (vs. 17).

Naaman had a hard time accepting the concept of simple obedience, but he got one thing right. It was time to stop sacrificing to “any other god.” When we are raised in “newness of life,” it is time to get rid of any behavior that directly or indirectly offers a sacrifice of our will to other gods such as money, sex, or power. This is where our cooperation is important. If we are willing to seek the Lord through the Scriptures and prayer, He will begin to reveal to us those areas of our life that are impure. Once we have a revelation of our sin, our only obligation is to take simple spiritual steps of faith, so that God can cleanse and restore us by His grace. We can then add to our testimony the words of David who said, “He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3).

MORAL PURITY

Purge Corrupt Imaginations

It is troubling to many men that they are not able to conform to the values they want to live by. I have talked to dozens of men over the years that had prayed with sincere remorse about sins in their life, but were unable to be free of the continuing torment of temptation. Eventually they had given up their good intentions, concluding that the standard they had set for themselves was unreachable. They returned to their sin, condemned in their heart by the knowledge that once “they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20). When the values we establish for ourselves become legalistic standards that are not supported by reasonable strategies, they fail. “Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Colossians 2:23).

The problem with rules, or laws, is that they do nothing about the inner man. Proverbs 23:7 (NAS) says that as a man “thinks within himself, so he is.” When we establish new values for our lives, they must be followed by reasonable strategies for changing how we think. What we really believe about the sinfulness or innocence of our behaviors, and how we consider thoughts, ideas, or temptations has everything to do with our ability to resist sin and obey the Lord. God’s mercy always includes forgiveness for our sins, but He doesn’t want us to continue in spiritual bondage, unable to obey Him. Instead, He wants to enable us to overcome evil temptations by changing the way we think.

When Jesus prayed for His disciples in John 17:15, He said, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” If we are willing to establish the values of the Word of God in our life and implement scriptural strategies to support them, we can experience “protection from the evil one.” Remember,

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war
after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 KJV

If we are going to attain moral purity in our lives, we must begin to identify the thoughts we have that are in conflict with the Word of God. This is really not too difficult. For the most part a man can begin with the obvious, those sinful things about money, sex, and power which more typically occupy his mind. As we identify and reject them, the more subtle imaginations—the one's that disguise themselves as wisdom or spirituality—will begin to surface. The thoughts and ideas that occupy our minds and prevent us from obeying God are strongholds for the devil. When he knows we have sinned in a certain way before, and have not rejected the underlying argument that supports the behavior, he is able to easily tempt us to repeat our sins.

If a man has an addiction to food, drugs, sex, or intellectualism, it is an indicator of a greater inner need, possibly from feelings of insecurity or inadequacy. The addictive behavior sedates the uncomfortable feelings. If we repent only of the addiction, without repenting from our justification of the addiction, and forgiving anyone associated with it, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the devil's temptation. A person could be tempted directly to eat or drink and have some success resisting. But the temptation will be much more subtle and indirect. First, you can expect to be rejected or disappointed and experience feelings of inadequacy. Then, you will be tempted to eat, drink, etc. The devil knows how to play this game and he works hard to establish strongholds.

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

1 Peter 1:13-14

MORAL PURITY

The following are some of the most common types of corrupt imaginations which entrap men. They are almost always connected with feelings of inadequacy and rooted in events that have caused us to feel insecure or rejected.

1) Greed. These imaginations are about money. They are directed toward the material things we want to possess or have in greater amounts. When we are expecting a promotion or working on a business transaction that will benefit us, we become fixated on that issue or event, fearful that it will not happen as we want it to. Fully expressed, these imaginations include the grasping, seizing, and predatory pursuit of our own desires.

2) Lust. These imaginations are about sex. They are directed toward causing us to experiment with and test the limits of sexual satisfaction. In particular, they cause us to defile the temple of the Holy Spirit and rebel against the normal order of creation. When a person is being driven by these imaginations he will find himself seeking new and more sensual expressions of sex.

3) Vengeance. These are imaginations about power. They focus on what we would like to do, or see done by someone else, when things do not go the way we want them. This is especially the case when we believe something is unfair or unjust. These imaginations include thoughts of reprisal, retaliation, punishment, and intense expressions of the need to see justice dispensed.

4) Intellectualism. These are imaginations about truth. They help us justify and defend our inadequacies, explain away our sins, and keep God comfortably at a distance so that we are not confronted with the realities of our life. These imaginations cause us to have an inordinate interest in philosophy and useless arguments that disguise the perverted nature of the desires that rage within us.

The bottom line is this, “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Romans 8:5). When you seriously consider doing what you might have only previously imagined, and then act upon it, you have created a stronghold in your mind. If the idea is of God, it will be a stronghold for Him. If not, it will become a stronghold for sin placed inside the borders of what is supposed to

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

be secure territory. For this reason alone, we should spend whatever time is necessary to identify, renounce, and purge corrupt imaginations. 1 Corinthians 2:10-12 says:

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

The secret channel that is created to our mind when we receive the Holy Spirit is of extreme strategic importance. God has always had access to our thoughts, but through this secret channel, we then have a secure way of receiving His. The Lord can help us evaluate ideas in the context of His Word, discern between good and evil, provide us with strategic or tactical guidance, and release wisdom to us as we need it in the secrecy and security of our mind. Then we can operate peacefully and with confidence, knowing that we have this advantage. In Colossians 1:9, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of these private communications by saying, "we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

Not only can another human being not penetrate this spiritual barrier, neither can the devil. In Daniel 2, there is a defining example of the strategic advantage we have with the Lord in this regard. King Nebuchadnezzar had some dreams which bothered him and that he wanted interpreted. "So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed" (vs. 2). The king did not trust them to interpret the dreams unless they could tell him what they were about, so he threatened to have them cut into pieces and turn their houses into piles of rubble if they failed, and receive gifts, rewards and great honor if they succeeded (vs. 5-6). Not only did that give them all of the human motivation they needed, they were the devil's first-line troops in a high stakes challenge. Their answer?

MORAL PURITY

There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men.

Daniel 2:10-11

The king was furious and ordered their execution, but when Daniel heard of it, he asked the king for the opportunity to seek the Lord about his dreams. When Daniel prayed, the Lord told him what the dreams were and what they meant, which Daniel then explained accurately to the king. If the devil were capable of reading the king's mind, or Daniel's, he certainly would have done so and saved his influence in the king's court, by providing the information to the magicians and sorcerers; but he did not. Daniel was able to stand confidently before the king with the Word of the Lord. This is an important lesson. Our mind can become a secure, peaceful place to hold and evaluate information in the Lord's presence until we are sure of its value, and until it is time to act upon it. The only way anyone will know our thoughts or private communications with the Lord is if we reveal them. This is one reason why Proverbs 11:12 says, "A man of understanding holds his tongue." Keeping silent about our thoughts and plans allows us to maintain our strategic advantage in spiritual warfare.

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:17-24

Resist the Power of Temptation

As we purge corrupt imaginations from our mind, we should be able to yield more of our life to the Holy Spirit. But sometimes the strongholds have become so well established that they perceptibly oppose being evicted. The arguments we have made defending our behaviors may have become hardened by our pride, leaving us aware of the Lord's conviction, but unable to wholeheartedly receive it and respond in obedience. When we yield to sinful behaviors, it is not unusual for strongholds to become colonized outposts for the devil, that provide access for demonic concepts to be implanted, and a place for evil spirits to express their personality.

After I became a serious disciple of Christ, I had an experience which helped me more fully understand the power a demonic spirit can have to press us toward evil behaviors. I had become convicted of a particularly sinful behavior and was in the process of purging it from my life. I had prayed and repented only to find myself repeating the behavior the very next day. I prayed and repented again, this time enthusiastically rejecting the sin in the presence of the Lord. Again, the very next day, the urge to repeat the behavior returned with unusual strength. I began to pray and ask the Lord for wisdom about my situation and while I was praying, I had a daydream.

In my dream I was operating a backhoe, trying to dig a long ditch. The Lord was directing me in a straight line and encouraging me to follow His directions. Standing on each side of the ditch were faceless beings trying to interfere with my progress, tempting me with arguments for disobeying, waving red flags to distract me, shouting directions to turn this way or that, and generally trying to turn my attention away from the Lord who was moving quietly ahead, expecting me to follow Him. I had both my hands on the

MORAL PURITY

steering wheel and as the pestering beings continued their interference, I struggled to stay focused only on the Lord, carefully following Him as He moved me through and around various obstacles.

Then I became aware of another set of hands pulling at the steering wheel and subtle, yet aggressive, arguments flooding my mind, trying to get me to give up resisting and respond to the beings along the ditch. I began to fight for control of the wheel realizing that the beings on the outside were being assisted by a force from within my soul to cause me to sin. Something more than my own sinful nature was involved and it was terrifying. Demonic spirits had become part of a coordinated effort to cause me to sin.

I knew that the dream helped explain the temptations I was fighting. Sometimes it really felt like there was another set of hands on the steering wheel of my will. There were times that it was so strong that I felt like there was another person inside me, fighting against my will to obey the Lord. I shared my experience with some friends who explained that most Christians believe demons exist, but our discussions often became sidetracked in debates about whether or not demons are in us, upon us, or around us trying to entangle us in sin. I noticed that the more a person argued against the possibility that a demon could be in them, the less likely they were to focus their energy on combating sins. It made me wonder if creating this debate might not be part of the devil's strategy to disguise how he works and distract us from pursuing purity. All I knew for sure was that I wanted to be delivered from my sin and from any evil spirits which were working to keep me in bondage. From both my personal experience and the indications of my dream, it was clear that something within me was driving me to respond to temptation. Whatever it was, it was also combating my attempts to rid myself of it.

I realized that if the devil's power to tempt me could be kept outside my soul, resisting it should not be nearly as difficult as what I was experiencing. So the way to reduce my struggle with temptation was to break the links between myself and temptation by eliminating the strongholds of sin within my soul. In James 1:14-15 we are told that a man is "tempted when, by his own evil

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” There are two important points here: First, the potential to sin begins within us as our own “evil desire is dragged away and enticed,” or tempted. Second, desire joins itself with temptation to conceive and give birth to sin. This means that we had to actively yield our will to temptation before sin could be conceived. So to free ourselves from the strongholds of sin, we have to take full responsibility for our actions and not try to blame our sins on anyone else, including the devil.

No matter how clever the devil’s scheme, nor how many demons or people were involved enticing, provoking, or tempting us, *we* yielded our will to sin. This brings us back to the fundamentals of repenting of our sins and forgiving the people who have been associated with them. Full repentance would also include rejecting any arguments we have made defending our sins. Anything we have said to diminish the evil nature of our sins or to excuse them away, gives demonic strongholds a place in our life. This is important to remember because the Holy Spirit will sometimes bring to our memory past sins and circumstances so that we can fully cleanse ourselves of defensive arguments. When this happens, it is a gift from the Lord, and we should take full advantage of the opportunity to renounce them.

Strongholds that continue to respond to temptation and conceive sin, require the deep cleansing and discipline of the Lord. And in His mercy, the Lord will create situations to force our sins out into the open so that we can take responsibility for them, strongly resist them, and learn new behaviors. It is a part of the routine discipline of the Lord to help us retrain our will so that we do not conceive sin, but resist temptation and obey His Word. In Hebrews 12:5-11 (NAS) we are told,

My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father

MORAL PURITY

does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

The discipline of the Lord does not lend itself to quick fixes, although our deliverance may come suddenly and miraculously as we follow His prescription for purity. How long it takes before we are set completely free from a stronghold and how much work may be involved on our part, is all in the hands of the Lord. But as the Lord said to Cain, “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:7).

When we obey the Lord, submit each area of our life to His will, and purify ourselves, we can have victory over any demonic scheme. It is a simple matter of submitting more of ourselves to the Lord and leveraging His unlimited power against the limited power of the devil. One of the ways we can deepen our submission to the Lord is by fasting. When we give up food as an act of faith, we weaken our flesh, silence our soul, and strengthen our spirit. This increases our ability to yield to the Holy Spirit and fellowship with the Lord. Fasting is an act of dependence upon the strength of the Lord and not our own. It is amazing how much more focused on the Lord we become, and how much easier it is to receive conviction and wisdom from Him. “‘Even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:12-13). When

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

temptations persist, fasting helps us draw closer to the Lord and deepens the revelation of our sin. The more we know about how and why we sin, the easier it is to fully repent and break the devil's link to our soul.

Like other spiritual disciplines, fasting is not meant to be a way for us to get what we want from God, but for us to conform to what He wants. There is no question that fasting benefits us greatly and brings His blessings upon us, as long as we do not equate starving ourselves with getting our own way. In Isaiah 58:1-4, the Lord rebukes Israel for this mentality.

Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Fasting is not just a religious exercise which is supposed to impress God and get Him to choose in our favor. He expects us to fast as a way to "rend our hearts" and stop sinning. Verse 6 says, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" The purpose of fasting is to break the yoke of sin in our lives. Fasting does not take the place of repentance. It should, however, help make full repentance much more likely.

In verse 7, the Lord continues describing the kind of fast He has chosen and it has some very surprising strategies. "Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer

MORAL PURITY

with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” Some people need help to get control of their will and motives. These external gestures are “economic acts of faith” that can touch our heart and cause us to get our eyes off of our own needs and onto others. This may be exactly what is needed to eliminate the power of temptation within our lives and give more of ourselves to the Lord. When we do these things, His promise is clear. In verse 8 He says, “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.” What demonic stronghold could stand against that?

Throughout the remainder of Isaiah Chapter 58 and on into Chapter 59, the Lord describes the kinds of behaviors He expects from us before we can fully enjoy our walk with Him. All of them require us to deny our own will, our own way of doing things, and the arguments we have used to defend them. Giving up food is just one way of fasting and giving God our will. But if we have pride in our heart, we may find ourselves, like Naaman, complaining about what the Lord requires of us. The whole point of fasting is to obey the Lord by simple faith and come to the place where we can honestly say,

My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not
haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled
and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its
mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Psalm 131:1-2

It is from this peaceful position of stilled submission to the Lord that we can find the real power to resist temptation and destroy the strongholds of the devil. To those who follow His ways:

He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:
“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the
humble.” Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

James 4:6-7

Take Control of Money

How we earn money and what we do with it are important indicators of a man's submission to God. A man is not really submitted to the Lord until the fruit of his labor is yielded. This is because a man's labor is such a big part of his life. Our relationship with our money is almost never neutral. Either we have control of our money or it has control of us. If money controls us, we will be primarily interested in obtaining money and the things it provides, especially pleasurable objects and experiences. If we control money, we are more likely to be interested in work itself, and how it fits into God's plans for our life. Then, money becomes merely what is needed to support our family and help others. King Solomon said, "There is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot" (Ecclesiastes 3:22). So for most men, a major test of submission to the Lord will be what we do with our money.

When I first became a follower of Christ, I noticed that our church placed a lot of emphasis on "tithing." The earliest record of tithing was when Abraham tithed to God's High Priest, Melchizedek, in Genesis 14:17-20. This was important to me because I had discovered that there was serious debate in the church about whether, as New Testament believers, we are still required to obey the "law" of tithing or are now under grace to give as we choose. But since Abraham's act of tithing had preceded the Mosaic Law, I realized that its validity could not be limited to a matter of law. In Hebrews 7, tithing is used as an example of how Christ's life transcends the law. It also says that Jesus is "a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (vs. 17). So to a follower of Christ, tithing is a method

MORAL PURITY

of offering Him the first fruits of our labor as worship. It tests and expresses our will to love, trust, and obey Him.

One Sunday morning our pastor shared several Scriptures from the Old and New Testaments which described how the Lord would prosper us if we obeyed Him, how the New Testament saints gave offerings, and generally how giving to God was an important measure of our love for Him. There are too many of these Scriptures to list here, but a search of your concordance on these subjects will take you all over the Bible. Then he mentioned Malachi 3:8-11 (NAS). It says,

“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed Thee?’ In tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more needed. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes” says the Lord of hosts.

Wow! Robbing God? That settled it for me. Besides, I could see that I needed someone to “rebuke the devourer for me.” I had noticed that a lot of my money was being spent fixing things that should not have broken or on business and household expenses that seemed out of control. As the pastor had said, “It made a lot more sense to have ninety percent of my income with God’s blessing, than it did to have all of it without His blessing.”

I rushed home and pulled out my calculator. I found that I was already giving eight percent. I calculated how much the extra two percent would be, and it was a very small amount, especially compared to being labeled a thief. Then all kinds of thoughts and fears about money flooded my mind and confused me. What the Apostle Paul wrote about in Romans 7 was happening to me. It

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

wasn't until I considered tithing as the law of God and something to be respected, that I understood my truly sinful nature and what was really in my heart. In verses 7-8 it says,

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.

My confrontation with the law of tithing surfaced fears, insecurity, selfish motives, hidden desires, and unbelief that I did not know were in me. And left unchallenged, they would not only affect my giving habits, but could be used by the devil at every opportunity to tempt me to conceive sin.

The devil uses any number of schemes to entangle us in sin and inhibit our faith regarding money. I have identified seven of the most common ones which are: idolatry, pride, tradition, greed, fear, debt, and prosperity. Each of these can begin with subtle imaginations and temptations which can then build into potential strongholds.

1) Idolatry. When something enters into our heart and stands between God and ourselves, it is an idol. We do not even have to worship it overtly. Whether it's a car, sports, or a woman, we only have to allow it to be more important than obeying God. In Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus said,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

MORAL PURITY

It is essential that our treasure be in Christ, not in money, things, relationships, or experiences that take us away from devotion to Him.

2) Pride. What men have to say about us and about the value of things we own, say, or do, can draw our heart away from the purity of obedience that the Lord expects. In Matthew 6:1-4, Jesus said,

Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

3) Tradition. Whether we give to be seen by men or just to stay in step with men's values, we may be allowing tradition to rule in our hearts. A good example of this is found in Matthew 15:3-9 where Jesus asked,

Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, "Honor your father and mother" and "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death." But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God," he is not to "honor his father" with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you. "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

4) Greed. We live in a world of materialism and greed where only what people touch or feel is real and success is measured by how many things we possess. The desires for what we want, or think we need, can overwhelm our ability to exercise restraint. Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). I had a good friend who grew up in great wealth. He was a successful businessman in his own right and made a very good living. He once told me that I would have more trouble with greed than he would because he had already tasted wealth and knew what it could and could not do. We often think wealth can do things for us that only a clean heart will accomplish.

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

1 Timothy 6:9-11

5) Fear. The pressures of raising a family or insecurity about our job or career can create fear about finances. When we have fear about money, shopping for food and clothes, especially for a young family, can be a test of faith. Sometimes we doubt in our heart about whether we will have enough if we give to the Lord. Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33,

Do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

MORAL PURITY

I learned that I was literally making a choice for righteousness when I gave my tithe to the Lord. I did so believing that God was more able than me and more dependable than any system. Hebrews 13:5 says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”

6) Debt. The motivations for going into debt can be produced by idolatry, pride, tradition, greed, or fear. I remember hearing one man say that he hoped he died in debt. This was part of his financial plan to avoid high taxation. It may have been a good plan for dealing with taxes, but it ignored the wisdom of the Bible. Debt is often the result of our inability to restrain ourselves from the impulses of greed or fear. It can also be the result of self-willed pride when we ignore wisdom and borrow to get what we want instead of waiting and saving the money we need. Proverbs 22:7 says, “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.” Debt is something to be avoided, whenever possible. Romans 13:7-8 says,

Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

A person who is in debt and unable to fulfill his obligations will know what it feels like to be the slave of several masters. When I faced this dilemma, I decided that my first debt was an obligation of faith to the Lord. I resisted the temptation not to give to the Lord first, and trusted Him to help me pay my bills and solve my financial problems. He did, and His help began in my heart as he brought conviction and cleansing to my motives.

7) Prosperity. Having a lot of money can be either a blessing or a curse depending upon what is in our heart. 3 John 1:2 (NAS) says, “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.” Some people pursue prosperity with so much effort that they lose sight of their real

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

purposes in life. When we focus on moral purity, our soul prospers and we are then able to handle more realistically the responsibilities associated with material prosperity. In Job 1:9-11 Satan accused Job of only obeying God in his prosperity.

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

I suppose that Satan had confidence in his theory because he had used it so many times to attack people’s faith in God, but he was wrong about Job. After Job had been attacked by the devil; lost virtually everything he had, including his family; was covered with sores; and was in excruciating pain; he said this,

If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold,
“You are my security,” if I have rejoiced over my
great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, if I
have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon
moving in splendor, so that my heart was secretly
enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage,
then these also would be sins to be judged, for I
would have been unfaithful to God on high.

Job 31:24-28

Job’s words and deeds are an example of how we should remain faithfully devoted to God in times of both prosperity and adversity. When we do not, we put ourselves at risk of losing the grace of God. Deuteronomy 28:47-48 says,

Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully
and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in
hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty,

MORAL PURITY

you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

This is a particularly ominous warning to people who take their prosperity for granted or who are living in false prosperity achieved by going into debt. Jesus said,

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self.

Luke 9:23-25

The real choice that is set before us is not between prosperity and poverty but between obedience or yielding to impurity. As we purge impure thoughts and motives about money, we should remember that:

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Abstain from Sexual Immorality

In Acts 15, there is an account of a visit to Jerusalem by Paul and Barnabas. They came from Antioch with other believers to meet with the apostles and elders to report to them about the conversion of the Gentiles under their ministry and to resolve a dispute about what should be required of the new Gentile believers.

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

Barnabas and Paul shared about the miraculous signs God had done among the Gentiles through them (vs. 12), and James confirmed that what had taken place in their ministry was “in agreement with the words of the Prophets” (vs. 15). Then he said,

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

Acts 15:19-20

These were the necessary fundamentals that the apostles and elders felt should be required of these new believers until they could be more fully taught the ways of the Lord. Abstaining from sexual immorality is fundamental. Although both the secular world and the church have been influenced by declining moral values, God’s Word regarding sexual immorality has not changed. So to find the grace of God that is required for moral purity, a follower of Christ must choose to live by a higher moral standard than both the secular world and some believers. This is a critically strategic issue for men who are struggling with impure thoughts and immoral sexual behaviors. In 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, the Apostle Paul challenges the church to sexual purity when he says,

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who

MORAL PURITY

is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Many men find themselves confused and unable to resolve the conflict between the convicting standards of the Scriptures and the absence of the right strategies for healing and deliverance. To help resolve this dilemma, men first need to fully understand the Lord's expectations for sexual purity and the consequences of disobedience. Then, when the standards and strategies are clear, our motivations can miraculously shift, releasing God's grace for deliverance from sexual immorality. But anything less than an honest confrontation with the Scriptures will produce only a short term effect of remorse and relief. The Scriptures are very clear about God's standards for moral purity, especially regarding sex. Related subjects can be found throughout the Bible, and the Lord's expectations for sexual behavior are often accompanied with practical wisdom about their importance. 1Thessalonians 4:3-8 says,

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 5:3-7 the admonition is even stronger.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.

Men who find rationalizations for sexual impurity are taking enormous risks. In Proverbs Chapters 5-7, the consequences of yielding to lust and sexual impurity for a man’s body, soul, work, family, and finances are described in excruciating simplicity. Phrases like “being reduced to a loaf of bread” or “taking fire in his lap” are common. There are also many references to the perverse thinking and lack of wisdom that leads to sexual sin. When a man indulges immoral sexual desires, he is, among other things, making a very costly business decision. He is taking immediate gratification in trade for something of far greater value. Hebrews 12:16 says, “See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.” When we yield the members of our body to the evil desires of our nature instead of to the Holy Spirit, we are literally trading our inheritance in the Kingdom of God for sexual pleasure.

Revelation 22:14-15 and 21:8 both emphasize the ultimate risks of indulging in sexual immorality and the kinds of company in which it puts us.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, *the sexually immoral*, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, *the sexually immoral*, those who practice

MORAL PURITY

magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

Sexual immorality is most often associated with the need to be accepted or to express power. It is usually rooted in an extreme of either pride or insecurity resulting from past rejections. It deceives us into believing that sexual gratification equates to love and acceptance. When we have been wounded emotionally, we can spend a lot of effort trying to equalize who and what we think we are with who and what we think we should be. This is often where the power of ambition is born. Ambition in and of itself is not necessarily wrong, but “where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (James 3:16). So a person who wants to be completely free of sexual torment must hate his sin enough to seek out and eliminate every cause of it from his soul, including any of his wrongly targeted ambitions. Psalm 97:10 says, “Let those who love the Lord hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.”

Lust establishes itself in a man’s soul through simple ideas and images. Then it begins to broaden the boundaries of our behavior and establish greater strongholds. So when we repent of our sins, we must also repent of our *potential* to sin. That includes purging sexual imaginations, the rationalizations for our sins, and any immodest behaviors or language. Ephesians 5:11-12 says, “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”

When a man commits sexual sin, he sows evil leaven into his body and soul. Then, with every immoral act it is kneaded more deeply into his being, eventually producing bondage and depravity he could not have imagined. For some, escaping the grip of sexual immorality might be as simple as following Job’s example. He said, “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1). This simple strategy would keep a lot of men out of trouble. But for others, the work of restoring their soul may depend on how much they have yielded to *porn* and ignited evil desires.

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

There are four Greek words in the New Testament which are related to *porn*. They are listed in Strong's Concordance as #4202-#4205. These Greek words have been anglicized into what we now refer to in the published form in magazines or films etc. as pornography. But you will probably be surprised to learn that the Greek definitions include: harlotry, idolatry, adultery, incest, fornication, indulging in unlawful lust with either sex, whoredom, male prostitution for profit or bribery, debauchery, and sexual immorality in general.

The Hebrew equivalent is the word *zanah* (#2181). It is found in many Scriptures, an example of which is Ezekiel 20:30, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Will you defile yourselves the way your fathers did and lust (#2181) after their vile images?'" The translations of *zanah* emphasize that God's people are regarded as His spouse and that idolatry and sexual impurity are related sins. When we find examples of idolatry in the Bible, contemporary society, or in the church, there will also be manifestations of sexual immorality. This is one of the reasons for the disappointing number of sexual failures among church leaders. As a fellow minister once said to me as we were discussing the sexual failures of a well-known pastor whom we had both served, "He was vulnerable because he was awash on a sea of adulation." The pastor and his congregation had begun to take his unusually eloquent pulpit ministry too seriously, placing him above reasonable accountability and ignoring many signals regarding his moral frailties. Whether we are the idolized or the idolater, sexual temptation cannot be far behind.

There are several practical steps that can be taken to eliminate sexual immorality from our life and extinguish the torment of sexual temptation.

1) "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18). The simplest way to prevent being seduced by the rationalizations and arguments of temptation is to flee from it. Keep a healthy distance between yourself and temptation. You know where it is, so don't go there. You know what it will say, so don't listen.

2) "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:2-3). Hide out in God's Word and in prayer. Immerse

MORAL PURITY

yourself in His presence and enjoy the peace that His hedge of protection provides.

3) “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming” (Colossians 3:5-6). Vigorously apply the strategies that will support moral purity in your life.

4) “Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:16-17). Yield to the Holy Spirit and resist the devil.

5) “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body” (Ephesians 5:25-30). A man who is busy loving his wife and ministering to her by the Word of God is not nearly so temptable. If there are conflicts between you and your wife, intercede for her in prayer. Bless her, forgive her sins, and confess your own sins both to God and her.

6) “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Hebrews 13:4). Here the word for “marriage bed” is *koite* (#2845), from which we derive the word *coitus* commonly understood as being the natural sexual act. The word for sexually immoral is *pornos* (#4205). This is a declarative statement which means that the act of sex between a married couple is to be kept free from adultery *and* sexual immorality or *porn*. Lust causes a man to experiment to find new ways of increasing sexual satisfaction which, when looked at objectively, can cause us to demean both ourselves and our partner.

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

7) “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Proverbs 18:10). When we make Christ the Lord over our sexual life, we are making a fundamental strategic move that will release His power and favor in great measure. “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him” . . . so that we . . . “may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Follow the Path of God’s Favor

There is a recurring theme in the Bible concerning God’s favor. Simply stated it is this: When we follow the Lord’s ways and obey Him, we receive His favor. In both the Old and New Testaments the words favor and grace are often used interchangeably. There are several Hebrew and Greek words that are translated either as favor, grace, kindness, or mercy; each indicating the range of God’s responses when we follow His ways. The expanded definitions include: to be pleased with, to satisfy a debt, to bend or stoop in kindness, and to divinely influence the heart. There is no limit to what God might do in any one of these categories. He can work in our own heart or in the heart of someone else on our behalf. One of my favorite Scriptures regarding this is Proverbs 21:1 (NAS) which says, “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.” I have often taken comfort in the Lord’s ability to turn a decision to my benefit, whether it was to bless me with what I wanted or to keep me from making a mistake by blocking my path.

God’s favor is not produced by any great work we do, how much money we make, or anything that is measurable against another man’s life. The power or prestige we gain in life may be impressive in the worldly sense, but they are neither indicators of our obedience to the Lord nor of His favor. There are too many cases where people with power, money, and worldly success have turned out to be deceivers, clearly not enjoying the favor of God.

For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from

MORAL PURITY

the world. The world and its desires pass away, but
the man who does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:16-17

God's favor is produced by our obedience to His Word and to His specific plans for us. It is indicated by His presence with us. In Exodus 33, Moses is involved in a discussion with the Lord about the leadership responsibilities he has been given regarding Israel. He asked the Lord for two things so that he could lead effectively. First he asked, "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you" (vs. 13). And second, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" (vs. 15 -16). In verse 17, the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." God's Presence was indicated by a pillar of fire at night and a cloud by daytime. Under our new covenant, God lives within us. When we cooperate with Him, His Presence is indicated by the release of His nature in and through us.

The life that God has for a man may be one of high office and great wealth or of meager duties and provision. But whether we have been given intellectual abilities and skills that are great or small, we will be judged by how we have responded to the will of the Lord with what we have. James 4:17 (NAS) says, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin." But if you say, "We knew nothing about this, does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" (Proverbs 24:12). God deals mercifully with us as individuals, based upon the grace He has given each of us, and how well we follow Christ's example of obeying the will of the Father. When we "flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22), we can expect the Lord to support our efforts.

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

Moral purity is the spiritual equivalent of the Promised Land. It is the fertile ground from which real peace and prosperity can flourish. Of course, this goes against the devil's plans and schemes, so at some point you can expect to be confronted by questions which are intended to turn you away from pursuing moral purity. One of them is "How much purity is enough?" You will have the option of a number of different opinions on this topic depending upon how many people you ask. But only one person's opinion really matters. What Christ says in your heart is the standard for moral purity. As long as you have a revelation of sinful behaviors, you are obligated to respond to the Holy Spirit and yield them to Him for cleansing. When you became a follower of Christ, you were choosing to "enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

The more we purge our lives of sinful behaviors, the closer our walk with the Lord becomes. We also become more effective for the Lord at home and at work. This is helpful to remember when trials and temptations surround us, because no matter how much you must battle "in your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4). Nothing we will ever endure will compare either to the sacrifice Christ has made on our behalf or the joy of walking in purity.

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

1 Peter 4:1-3

MORAL PURITY

After the death of Moses, the Lord spoke to Joshua about taking His people across the Jordan into the Promised Land. The words that the Lord spoke to him then are just as relevant today for any man who sees the strategic importance of moral purity and wants to lead his family into prosperity. The Lord said to Joshua,

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:6-9

In Joshua chapters 23 and 24, we find Joshua as an old man recounting to the elders and leaders of Israel everything God had done to bless and prosper them and hold them accountable for the sins that had crept into their lives. He repeated to them the same message as was given to him by the Lord before he crossed the Jordan. “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or left” (Joshua 23:6). He repeated the warnings of God to remain pure in their commitment to the Lord, and the consequences of disobedience. And he challenged them saying, “Yield your hearts to the Lord” (Joshua 24:22). Joshua had lived on both sides of the Jordan and knew that there was nothing better than serving the Lord. He also knew that the future of Israel was not in its corporate power or wealth, but in its obedience to the Lord and His commands. At the end of his life Joshua was still calling God’s people to purity saying,

BECOMING A RELIABLE MAN

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:14-15

The record of Joshua's exhortation for moral purity is not unique. All through the Bible, there are examples of kings, prophets, apostles, and Christ Himself repeating the message. It is a strategic theme because the primary conflict within a man's soul is one of moral purity. So the man who follows Christ should not consider it unusual to experience the regular prodding of the Holy Spirit to examine the nature of his behaviors. It is the favor, grace, kindness, and mercy of the Lord.