

1. **Gospel meeting theme: SPIRITUAL PREPARATION.**
2. **What is our spiritual service—not conformed, but transformed.** Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 1:14-15; Titus 2:12; James 1:17.
3. **Why? WE ARE CONFORMED!** “Religion tends to be captured by its culture. Rather than standing in judgment of the world around them, most religious people find ways to give divine sanction to their society. I have no difficulty in seeing that in other people. Having spent a lifetime being a religious historian, it is all too obvious to me that the religious beliefs of most people are thinly veiled rationalizations for their conduct rather than a transforming influence upon it. While I see that in others, I fear it in me ... I have ... a brooding fear that I fall into the same ease in my culture as those around me. Few themes in the Bible recur more often than the plaintive plea to ‘come out from among them, and be ye separate’ (2 Corinthians 6:17). And few things trouble me more than seeing churches filled with good people being sucked into the maelstrom of a decadent culture—listening to the world, reading its books, watching its television and swallowing its values. They go to church and I see them there. But their message has become ‘Christ and Culture’ [instead of Christ not culture, *tdn*]. In the gravest terms I tell you—that cannot be. Let us purify our minds and walk circumspectly” (Ed Harrell, *Christianity Magazine*, June 1988, p. 11).
4. **Some illustrations of the world's influence on the church.**
  - A. **Racism.**
    - 1) **Did the culture of the American south affect churches of Christ in the first half of the twentieth century?** According to Richard T. Hughes in his 1996 book, *“Reviving The Ancient Faith, The Story of Churches of Christ in America,”*

“We should not be surprised to discover that by the 1920s and 1930s ... racism had institutionalized itself within the church just as surely as it had within the larger culture.

One sign of this increasingly institutionalized racism is that some — perhaps many — among Churches of Christ belonged to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. James Allen, editor of the *Gospel Advocate* at that time, claimed that ‘many of the preachers’ were members, and one student of race relations among Churches of Christ reported that many members of Churches of Christ belonged to the Klan in that period.

The clearest evidence of institutionalized racism within the church, however, was the pattern of segregation that increasingly dominated the lives of both individuals and congregations of Churches of Christ in the early twentieth century. This was not a matter of mere separation of the races by mutual consent; it was a matter of whites excluding blacks from their fellowship because they did not view them as their equals.

G. C. Brewer, for example, candidly recalled the years of his youth in Tennessee in the early twentieth century. “None of us thought of inviting Negroes into our homes as guests or of sitting down to eat with them at the same table; we felt, as a matter of course, that they should have the same food that we ate, but that they should eat in the kitchen or in the servants’ quarters.’ Brewer acknowledged that ‘this was the condition that prevailed and this we accepted as right and satisfactory.’ At the same time, he could resolutely affirm that ‘we were not prejudiced against the Negroes.’

The standard pattern of institutional segregation is exemplified in the poignant story of Marshall Keeble. Because of his ability to move crowds and win converts, Keeble distinguished himself as the most successful of all the black preachers among Churches of Christ during the twentieth century. He routinely made hundreds of converts in weeklong gospel meetings and revivals in black communities throughout the South from the earliest years of the twentieth century until the 1960s ...

In the early 1940s, Keeble had an exchange with Foy Wallace Jr. that reflects the pattern of segregation that had become routine by that point. Wallace initiated the exchange when he complained that certain black preachers were attracting large numbers of whites to their meetings. Wallace doubtless had Keeble in mind when he complained that ‘if any of the white preachers should say everything they [the black preachers] say to a word, it would sound so common that the brethren would stop it. But when a negro says it, in negro manner, the brethren paw up the ground over it.’ He went on to say that ‘reliable reports have come to me of white women, members of the church, becoming so animated over a certain colored preacher as to go up to him after a sermon and shake hands with him *holding his hand in both of theirs*.’ In Wallace’s view, ‘that kind of thing will ... make fools out of the negroes.’ Further, ‘for any woman in the church to so far forget her dignity, and lower herself so, just because a negro has learned enough about the gospel to preach it to his race, is pitiable indeed.’ Wallace commended another model instead:

‘When N. B. Hardeman held the valley-wide meeting at Harlingen, Texas, some misguided brethren brought a group of negroes up to the front to be introduced to and shake hands with him. Brother Hardeman told them publicly that he could see all of the colored brethren he cared to see on the outside after services, and that he could say everything to them he wanted to say without the formality of shaking hands.’

No one protested Wallace’s harangue, in print at any rate. But relations between the races were such among Churches of Christ in the 1940s that Keeble felt constrained to abase himself before Wallace in the next issue of the *Bible Banner*. ‘For over thirty years,’ Keeble wrote,

‘I have tried to conduct my work just as your article in the *‘Bible Banner’* of March suggested. Taking advice from such friends as you have been for years has been a blessing to my work. So I take the privilege to thank you for that instructive and encouraging article. I hope I can conduct myself in my last days so that you and none of my friends will

have to take back nothing they have said complimentary about my work or regret it.'

Wallace was quick to commend Keeble's compliant spirit. 'This letter,' he wrote, 'is characteristic of the humility of M. Keeble. It is the reason why he is the greatest colored preacher that has ever lived.' Black preachers like Keeble, Wallace affirmed, 'know their place and stay in it, even when some white brethren try to take them out of it' ...

Without meaning to do so, Foy Wallace Jr. offered perhaps the most telling reason for the growth of institutionalized racism among Churches of Christ in the twentieth century when he wrote that an acceptable black preacher is one who 'knows what his relationships are in the church in the light of his relationships with society.' In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, the values of white southern culture increasingly defined the racial posture of white Churches of Christ."

- 2) **Alma Phillips and Harding.**
- 3) **Florida College.**
- 4) **Response to growth in black membership in Lafayette, Louisiana.**
- 5) **Response to my initial sermon.**
- B. **Immodesty.** Mini-skirts v. ankle length dresses.
- C. **Uncleanness.** "The Battle of the Sexes" and "Sex and the City."
5. **The world influences the church:**
  - A. **Profoundly.** 1 Corinthians 15:33. Truly, "what effects the world, effects the church.
  - B. **Negatively.** 2 Timothy 4:10; James 2:1. "*Partiality* translates a Greek word that means, literally, 'receiving the face' ... To 'receive the face' is to make judgments and distinctions based on external considerations, such as physical appearance, social status or race" (Moo). James 4:4.
  - C. **Often unknowingly.** Colossians 2:8. "See to it" is "beware" in the NKJV.
6. **Is the world influencing us personally?** Some litmus tests.
  - A. **Are we growing spiritually?** Mark 4:18-19.
  - B. **Are we like Lot?** 2 Peter 2:7-8.
  - C. **Are we at home in the world?** John 8:23; Philippians 3:17-21.
  - D. **How are we handling aging?** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.
  - E. **Are we suffering as a Christian?** 1 Peter 4:4; Luke 6:26; John 15:19; 2 Timothy 3:12.
  - F. **Do we worry?** Luke 12:22-32.
7. **If we are honest with ourselves, the real question is not *whether* we are being influenced by the world, but *how* are we being influenced by the world.**
8. **To be transformed, we need to:**
  - A. **Quit complaining.** Philippians 2:14.
  - B. **Keep entertainment pure and in its proper place.** Psalms 101:3; 2 Timothy 3:1-2, 4-5; Titus 3:3; Luke 8:14.
  - C. **Wear proper clothing.** 1 Timothy 2:9-10. Thursday night's lesson.
  - D. **Keep touching pure.** Romans 16:16. Let your kisses reveal your heart, not your hormones. Friday night's lesson.
  - E. **Have inner peace.** "We Americans have more to make life easy than any people who have ever lived. We live in the finest houses, wear the nicest clothes, and eat the best food that any generation has ever known; yet, at the same time, today we have more suicides, more divorces, more people in jail, more mental illnesses than any people of all time. For many people, life is a grim, desperate, unhappy affair" (Allen). John 14:27; Philippians 4:4.
  - F. **Practice hospitality.** Hebrews 13:2. Tuesday night's lesson.
  - G. **Be servants.** 1 Corinthians 8:13; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.
  - H. **Be evangelizing.** Acts 8:4; Acts 17:6. "Did I firmly believe, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, religion would be to me everything. I would cast aside earthly enjoyments as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I should labor in its cause alone. I would take thought for the morrow of eternity only. I would esteem one soul gained for heaven worth a life of suffering. Earthly consequences should never stay my hands nor seal my lips. Earth, its joys and its grief's, would occupy no moment of my thoughts. I would strive to look upon eternity alone, and on immortal souls around me, soon to be everlastingly miserable or everlastingly happy. I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season, and my text would be, 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul.'"
  - I. **Be unified.** John 17:20-23.
  - J. **Keep our speech pure.** Ephesians 5:3-4, 12.
  - K. Exhaustive? No. Unrealistic? No, just unworldly and that's exactly what Jesus expects us to be.
9. **What must we do so we are prepared to become as spiritually different from the world as Christ?**
  - A. **Believe it is possible.** 1 John 4:4; 5:4-5.
  - B. **Repent.** Colossians 3:2; Galatians 6:14; Psalm 101:2, 3-4.
  - C. **Study.** Romans 12:2; John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 1 Timothy 6:20-21.
  - D. **Make accurate application.** John 3:20-21. This lesson.
  - E. **Do whatever it takes to obey.** Titus 2:11-13; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Mark 10:17-22.
  - F. **Pray.** John 17:1, 11, 15. Wednesday night's lesson.

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. Luke 10:30-37.
2. Every sin is either a sin of commission or a sin of omission.
3. We sin by commission when we do or **commit** things we should not do. Examples: lying, stealing, speaking corrupt words. Ephesians 4:25, 28-29. The thieves.
4. We sin by omission when we don't do or **omit** things we should do. James 4:17. Examples: not visiting the fatherless and widows in their afflictions (James 1:27); not abounding in the grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8:7); not loving our wives just as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). The priest and the Levite.
5. The golden rule is not, "Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you." The golden rule includes this principle but it encompasses far more than this principle. Rather, the golden rule is, "Do to others what you want them to do to you." Matthew 7:12.
6. What is true of the golden rule is true of all Christianity. Christianity is more than not doing things that are inherently wrong. It includes this, but its reach is far greater in scope. Christianity is also about doing things that are inherently right. Galatians 5:19-23A. Our task as Christians is to be putting off the latter AND to be putting on the former. We must do both if we want to be pleasing to God.
7. To illustrate, to please God we must not get drunk. But, to please God we must do more than just that. We must also put on self-control. The former will stop us from drinking a large quantity of beverage alcohol. The latter will stop us from drinking any beverage alcohol.
8. By passing the wounded man by on the other side, the priest and Levite were just as guilty before God as the thieves. Likewise, we are just as guilty when we fail to do something we should have done as we are when we do something we should not have done.
9. I'm concerned about God's people. I'm not sure we are prepared to put off sins of commission as we ought. I hope this morning's lesson will help us do just that.

**TO PUT OFF SINS OF OMISSION WE MUST:**

1. **Learn the actual demands of righteousness.**
  - A. Some people don't put off sins of omission as they ought because they don't realize all the good things God expects them to be doing.
  - B. I don't know about you, but the more I learn the word of God, the more I come to understand that the realm of good works I need to be doing is far larger than I previously imagined.
  - C. Put another way, the more I study, the greater I come to see the gap between what I do and what I must do to be holy just as God is holy.
  - D. I think Paul learned this same truth as he grew in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15.
  - E. The standard for what we should do is the word of God. Practically applied, the standard for what we should do is what Jesus would do if He were in our place. At the end of any given day, how many of us can look back on our day and honestly say that we did everything Jesus would have done if He had been in our place.
  - F. Make no mistake about it, the bar of righteousness is high. "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This [is] the first commandment. And the second, like [it], [is] this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:30-31). "Let all [that] you [do] be done with love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
  - G. The demands of Christianity pervade every aspect of our lives, certainly our words and deeds (Colossians 3:17), but also the thoughts and intents of our minds. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; 1 Corinthians 4:5 ("counsels" is "motives" in the NASB); Hebrews 4:12-13.
  - H. Luke 10:25-29.
2. **Not fear failure.** Some people don't put off sins of omission as they ought because they fear failure. Matthew 25:24-25, 30. The only thing worse than trying and failing is failing to try.
3. **Work hard.**
  - A. Some don't put off sins of omission as they ought simply because doing so takes a lot of hard work.
  - B. It is relatively easy to put off sins of commission. The really hard work begins when we start putting off sins of omission.

- C. What is harder, not committing adultery against your wife, or loving her like Christ loved the church? What is harder, not supporting institutionalism from the church treasury, or visiting the fatherless and widows in their distress as individual Christians? What is harder, not lying or telling people the truth about the gospel of Jesus Christ? What is harder, not robbing and beating people, or doing what the Samaritan did? Matthew 25:26-28.
- 4. **Not procrastinate.** Some people don't put off sins of omission as they ought because they put off until tomorrow what they must be doing today. Proverbs 3:27-28. Truly, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.
- 5. **Accurately assess our abilities and opportunities for doing good.**
  - A. Some people don't put off sins of omission as they ought because they underestimate their abilities and their opportunities for doing good.
  - B. We've often heard, and rightly so, that responsibility is a function of ability (Matthew 25:14-15A; 1 Peter 4:10-11A) and opportunity (Galatians 6:10; Philippians 4:10). In other words, ability + opportunity = responsibility.
  - C. Admittedly, determining ability and opportunity involves a degree of judgment. But, we must use good judgment because we will answer to God for the choices we make. Matthew 25:19.
  - D. We all have far greater ability to do good than we realize. Ephesians 3:20; Matthew 25:29A.
  - E. Brethren, we all have ample opportunities for doing good. John 4:35. Let's be honest with ourselves. There are so many opportunities for us to do good that our constant task should be determining which good deeds have the highest priority and our constant lament should be that there is always more work than week when it comes to doing all the good that needs to be done.
- 6. **Not minimize God's expectations about sins of omission.**
  - A. Given the height of the bar of righteousness, I strongly suspect that many people really don't think God is going to hold us responsible for failing to do what He says we ought to be doing. But, there is absolutely no scriptural reason to draw this conclusion.
  - B. Consider, for example, Matthew 12:35-37. "Idle" is *argos*, literally "not working." It means "free from labor, at leisure ... lazy, shunning the labor which one ought to perform." Idle words are not inherently evil words, they are words that simply serve no constructive purpose. God makes it clear that time is too precious to waste. Proverbs 14:23; Colossians 4:2-5 (in the NKJV, "making the most of the opportunity" is "redeeming the time").
  - C. Brethren, God knows the bar of righteousness is high and that we aren't always going to clear it. "There is not a righteous man on earth who [continually] does good and who never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20 NASB). We must avoid two extremes.
    - 1) First, we must not think that God will accept anything less than us trying to do the best we can to clear the bar. This is what He says we ought to do and it's something we all can do. Revelation 2:4-5; 3:15-16, 19.
    - 2) Second, we must not think that God expects anything more than us trying to do the best we can to clear the bar. That's all we can do and it's all God asks. There is absolutely no reason for any of us to get discouraged and quit trying to clear the bar. Our standing with God does not depend on us always clearing the bar. That's salvation by works. That's basing our salvation on our own perfection. Rather, our standing with God depends on us always trying to do our best to clear the bar. That's salvation by faith. That's basing our salvation on Jesus' perfection and His gracious terms of pardon. Galatians 2:15-16.

#### **SOME APPLICATIONS:**

- 1. **Are we leaving things undone?** Joshua 11:15.
- 2. **Are we working as hard as we ought?** Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14. Can we honestly say we are trying to do our best to put off the old man and put on the new? Are we working so hard that we feel the need to pray as Jesus did in Matthew 9:35-38?
- 3. **Are we working hard at the most important things?** Titus 3:14; Matthew 23:23. The greatest dangers to the most important thing are the second and third most important things.
- 4. **Have we retired too soon?** 1 Corinthians 15:58. Heaven is the place for Christians to rest. Hebrews 4:9. If we are still breathing, we must not bury our talents. We still have many important things to do. Psalm 71:17-18; Philippians 3:12-14; 2 Timothy 4:7, 6; Philippians 3:15.

**CONCLUSION:** Matthew 25:31-46.

**INTRODUCTION:** How many can list from memory the nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit? How many can confidently explain the meaning of each? The fruit of the Spirit is the heart of Christianity, its essence, a weightier matter of the law. Frankly, if we don't understand the fruit of the Spirit, we don't understand God.

**TEXT:** Galatians 5:22-23A.

**DISCUSSION:**

**1. The fruit of the Spirit is singular.**

- A. It's "fruit," not "fruits." It's an important difference. As fruit of the apple tree is at once colorful, shiny, firm, juicy, sweet, nutritious, edible, seed-bearing, and durable; so the fruit of the Spirit is at once love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- B. To be a child of Satan, we need only practice one of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). To be a child of God, however, we must put on and continually grow in *all* aspects of THE fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

**2. Bearing the fruit of the Spirit requires much more than not doing wrong.**

- A. Pleasing God requires *two* things—not doing wrong *and* doing right. We can do the former without the latter.
- B. For example, to please God we must not get drunk. Does this mean we can get tipsy? No! Not getting drunk is only half the battle. To please God we must also exercise self-control and drinking clearly impairs self-control even if we stop short of drunkenness. Consider Leviticus 10:8-11; Proverbs 31:4-5.
- C. Again, to please God we must not hate. Does this mean we can be indifferent? No! Not hating is only half the battle. To please God we must also love and love precludes indifference as much as hatred.
- D. I don't think some people understand this principle. Otherwise, they wouldn't defend the indefensible.
- E. Not doing wrong is the silver rule. To be golden, we must also do what's right and that's much more than not doing wrong.

**3. The fruit of the Spirit condenses the complete Spirit led life into nine words we must fully understand.**

**A. Love.**

- 1) Love, *agape* in the Greek, is the motivation or driving force of the Spirit led life. 1 Corinthians 16:14; 13:3.
- 2) We *agape* love when we want and do what's truly best.
- 3) Since God is love and He alone knows what is truly best, we *agape* love when we treat Him, others, and ourselves the way He commands. John 14:15; 1 John 5:2.
- 4) As with Galatians 5:22-23, we should be able to quote and confidently explain the meaning of each aspect of love listed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

**B. Joy.**

- 1) Joy, *chara* in the Greek, is the way the Spirit led life effects emotions. Philippians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:8B.
- 2) Admittedly, sorrow has its place in a Christian's life, but joy is "*the distinguishing atmosphere of the Christian life*. We may put it this way—whatever be the ingredients of the Christian life, and in whatever proportions they are mixed together, joy is one of them. In the Christian life joy always remains a constant ... It has been said that 'Rejoice!' is the standing-orders of the Christian ... Every virtue and all knowledge is to be irradiated with joy; even the patience and the endurance which might well be bleak and grim are to be lit with joy ... There is no virtue in the Christian life which is not made radiant with joy; there is no circumstance and no occasion which is not illumined with joy. A joyless life is not a Christian life, for joy is the one constant in the recipe for Christian living" (Barclay).

**C. Peace.**

- 1) Peace, *eirene* in the Greek, is way the Spirit led life effects relationships. *Peace* is a relationship word. It describes the state of a relationship between two or more parties.
- 2) In a Spirit led life, there is peace with God (Romans 5:1); as much as depends on it, peace with other people (Proverbs 16:7); and peace within (Philippians 4:6-7).

- 3) Biblical peace is much more than the absence of conflict. It describes healthy, secure, intimate, satisfying, growing relationships.
- 4) Peace following love and joy isn't accidental. Love nurtures relationships and relationships are the source of real joy in life.

#### D. Long-suffering or Patience.

- 1) Long-suffering or patience, *makrothumia* in the Greek, is the way the Spirit led life reacts when it suffers. 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15.
- 2) The Spirit led life doesn't blow up, complain, get even, or give up. Rather, it stays calm, looks for the good in the bad, lets things go, and stays optimistic.

#### E. Kindness.

- 1) Kindness, *chrestotes* in the Greek, is the way the Spirit led life reacts to the suffering of other people.
- 2) Three key verses. Luke 5:39; Romans 16:18; Matthew 11:28-30.
- 3) Illustration. Psalm 34:4, 6-10 ("good" is *chrestotes* in the LXX).
- 4) The Spirit led life sees suffering, is touched by it, wants to ease it, and does so whenever possible.

#### F. Goodness.

- 1) Thus far we've discussed the motive, effects, and reactions of the Spirit led life.
- 2) Goodness, *agathosune* in the Greek, is what the Spirit led life does because it's driven by love, seeking joy and peace, and reacting to suffering, i.e. it goes about doing abundant good. Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:10.
- 3) To paraphrase Hamilton, "Goodness is love in action, love with its hand to the plow, love with the burden on its back, love following the footsteps of Him who went about continually doing good."

#### G. Faithfulness.

- 1) Faithfulness, *pistis* in the Greek, is one reason why the Spirit led life goes about doing abundant good.
- 2) The Spirit led life understands that God and men are depending on it to do what love demands. 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:2.
- 3) Thus, the Spirit led life is faithful, i.e. reliable, dependable, trustworthy. Matthew 25:14-16, 19-21.

#### H. Gentleness.

- 1) Gentleness, *prautes* in the Greek, is how the Spirit led life goes about doing whatever love demands. Galatians 6:1.
- 2) The Spirit led life understands that *how* we say or do is just as important as *what* we say or do. Ephesians 4:15A; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 1 Peter 3:15.

#### I. Self-control.

- 1) Self-control, *egkrateia* in the Greek, is another reason why the Spirit led life goes about doing whatever love demands.
- 2) The Spirit led life fully recognizes that it can do all things through Christ who strengthens it. Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 3:20.
- 3) Thus, the Spirit led life makes good, not excuses. 1 Corinthians 9:25-27.

### 4. The fruit of the Spirit is limitless.

- A. 1 Thessalonians 3:12; Philippians 4:4; 2 Peter 1:2; etc.
- B. The wonderful thing about the Spirit led life is that it just keeps on getting "richer, fuller, deeper ... sweeter as the years go by."

**INTRODUCTION:** Bible study with Danny Norris. Why do bad things happen to good people? "Why does God allow it? We live in a crazy world. We are surrounded by things that seem to be irrational. Murders, rapes, child abuse, disease, war, famine, crime, divorce, death, pain, corruption, natural disasters and a host of other things seem to swirl around us continually. The atheists are not the only ones asking 'Why?' Job asked 'Why?' Jesus even expressed frustration with the condition of this world as He wept over Lazarus, Jerusalem and His betrayal. Why are we in such an imperfect world? Why could God not have done a better job of creating us so that these things do not happen?" (John Clayton).

**INITIAL THOUGHTS:**

1. **Who are these good people we hear so much about?**

- A. The Biblical view of man. Romans 3:9, 23; 6:23A; Romans 7:24A; Luke 13:1-5.
- B. We use the wrong standard to determine goodness. We are like prisoners who try to make themselves feel better by saying, "Well at least I'm not a \_\_\_\_\_." Maybe not, but they deserve to be in jail just as much as a \_\_\_\_\_. 2 Corinthians 10:12.
- C. The proper standard by which to judge man's goodness is God. By that standard, we're all wretches. Isaiah 6:1-5; Luke 5:8. Mark 10:17-18.
- D. What's surprising is not that bad things happen, but that good things happen at all, much less as much as they do. Instead of "Why me?" the question should be "Why *not* me?" Our song should be, "God is so good" and "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

2. **Are they necessarily bad things?**

- A. Admittedly, some things that happen are evil. Joseph's older brothers selling him into slavery.
- B. But, some things that happen aren't good or evil, they're just things. John 9:1-3A.
- C. And, even evil things can work together for good. Romans 8:28.

**POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS:** "Bad" things happen because of ...

- 1. **Time and chance.** Ecclesiastes 9:11-12.
- 2. **Free will.** "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Bad things happen because other people choose to do evil and/or because we choose to do evil. Potiphar's wife, the prodigal son.
- 3. **Satan.** Job 1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:7, "A thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan."
- 4. **God.** If God does something, it's not bad. However, He does sometimes allow bad things to happen. Why?
  - A. **Our suffering sometimes directly serves God's best interests.** John 9:3B.
  - B. **Our suffering sometimes directly serves our own best interests.** *Suffering should keep us ...*
    - 1) **Humble.** 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.
    - 2) **Pilgrims and strangers.** "Why must there be suffering, sorrow, heartache, death, even among God's own children? ... *Suffering keeps this world from becoming too attractive.* Though our dwelling places here may have more permanent foundations than the Bedouin tents of our father Abraham, we are reminded that we are no less pilgrims and strangers (1 Peter 2:11.) Woe to the man or woman whose life here on this earth is so pleasant that he forgets about heaven. But the affairs of this life are so ordered that this world soon loses its attraction. Most young people would like to live forever but by the time a man reaches his three score and ten he is usually happy he has been able to endure one life and is ready for something better. This world is too full of pain, grief, and heartache to be very pleasant or attractive for very long" (Don McWhorter).
    - 3) **Joyful.** What has taking things for granted or acting like nothing bad is ever going to happen done for us? Imagine how joyful life would be if we really did live every day like it might be last for us, a loved one, etc.
    - 4) **Committed.** Job 1:20-21; 2:9-10.
    - 5) **Growing.** Hebrews 12:3-11. Frankly, if we shake our fist at God because we suffer, we, of all people, need to suffer that we might recognize where we fall short so we can mature in Christ.
    - 6) **Etc.**
- 5. **Why "possible" explanations?** Because, this side of eternity, I don't think we can know with complete assurance why "bad" things happen.

**APPLICATIONS:**

1. **Anticipate hurdles.**

- A. "Living life is a lot like running a race that includes hurdles. Some people expect life to be easy and smooth. When they encounter a hurdle, they become surprised, angry, or fearful. They don't think they should be expected to deal with such things. So they wait around for someone to remove the obstacle, they try to find shortcut around it, or they simply give up and stop running. And during the process, their attitude gets worse and worse" (John C. Maxwell).
- B. Ecclesiastes 7:13-14.
- C. Illustration: what are we going to do when we are put in a nursing home?

2. **We're not smart enough to be God, so don't even try!**

"I would issue a challenge to those who feel that God should have created a better world: *how would you design such a world?* What would you do that would be different than what God has done? Someone will say, 'Well, I'd create a

world with no war!' That is a marvelous idea, but how would you do it? Would you cause anyone who picked up a weapon to die? Would you cause anyone who thought a violent thought to drop dead? Would you destroy any religious or political system which in any way involved force to promote its ideology? Would you make men's minds so that they could not think a violent or destructive thought? I would suggest to you that to eliminate war, you would have to eliminate man's ability to plan, create, reason or advance!!! As long as man can dream, create, design and imagine, the potential for bad things to happen is there!!! Only if man becomes an android—like a robot or puppet, incapable of engaging in evil or advancing in good—can one conceptualize a world without the potential for war.

When one really gets down to basics, everything positive in our existence is dependent upon our ability to choose. Love is only possible because we have the choice of not loving. If there was no choice, love would be impossible. Doing something nice to someone only has meaning because we have the choice of not doing something nice. Giving only has meaning because we have the option of not giving. Every act we do consciously has meaning because we have the choice of not doing what God has told us to do. The admonition of **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling** (Philippians 2:12) has special meaning because it is our choice as to whether we wish to follow God's plan or not.

At this point, another principle comes into play. In Galatians, we read, **For every man shall bear his own burden....Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.** The meaning of the passage is clear. If we jump off a bridge, we are going to hit the bottom. If someone pushes us off a bridge, we are still going to hit the bottom. One might say, 'Well, why doesn't God intervene in these cases? Why doesn't God catch the person who falls or jumps and prevent the damage from occurring?'

What kind of a world would it be if such a plan were in effect? It might sound beautiful at first glance, but if you keep thinking, you will see that the end result would be very negative. Any consequence of anything we did would be good. Nothing we ever did would be wrong or bad, and there would be no need of improvement. No building would be built so poorly that it would collapse because God would always repair the damage. No one would need to do a good job of flying or building a car because God would prevent all consequences. No marriage would be special and no one would need to make an effort to bring joy and beauty into someone else's life because any bad things that might happen would be prevented. No one would need to worry about fixing a meal properly because food poisoning or special needs would not exist. No doctor would need to worry about his competency or surgery because God would rectify all his mistakes. We would live in a boring, meaningless haze of indifference. In cultures that have become reasonably affluent and successful, that attitude and climate has in fact developed. Many of our problems in the United States today and all our apathy and indifference in the Church is related to this very situation" (John Clayton).

### 3. **Keep perspective.**

#### A. "Dear Mom,

Since I have been away at college, one full semester, I think it's time I bring you up to date as to what is going on. Shortly after I arrived at college, I got bored with dormitory life and stole fifty dollars from my roommate's purse. With the money, I rented a motorcycle, which I crashed into a telephone pole a few blocks from the dorm.

I broke my leg in the accident, but I was rescued by the young doctor who lives upstairs in the apartment house on the corner. He took me in, set my leg, nursed me back to health, and thanks to him, I'm up and around again.

We wanted to let you know that we're going to be married as soon as possible. Unfortunately, we're having some trouble with the blood test—they're not sure what the disease is, but it keeps showing up in the test. We hope to get that worked out quickly so that we'll be married before the baby arrives. Shortly thereafter we will all be home to live with you and Dad. And I just know you will learn to love the baby as much as you love me, even though the baby's dad is a different religion and wants us to convert. Please understand, the only reason we're coming back home to stay is that my husband-to-be got tossed out of medical school because he was too busy taking care of me to complete his work.

Really, Mom, I didn't steal any money or rent a motorcycle or hit a telephone pole or break my leg. I didn't meet a young doctor. There's no disease and I'm not expecting a baby. And I won't be coming home to live with you and Dad either. However, I *am* getting a D in algebra and an F in geology, and I wanted you to accept these grades in their proper perspective!" (John Maxwell).

#### B. Brethren, even when bad things happen, we have ample reasons to rejoice. "When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed ..."

### 4. **Focus on how to respond, not why it has happened.**

### 5. **Accept what is and make the best of it; refuse to be soured by life's lemons, let God make lemonade.** We must take responsibility for our own joy (or lack thereof); objectively determine what we need to do differently; and quit spinning our wheels.

### 6. **Wait on the Lord.** Daniel 3:16-18.

**CONCLUSION:** "*Prayer Of The Handicapped.* I asked God for strength, that I might achieve, I was made weak, that I might learn to obey ... I asked for health, that I might do greater things, I was given infirmity, that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy, I was given poverty, that I might be wise ... I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men, I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God ... I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life, I was given life that I might enjoy all things ... I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I had hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am among all men most richly blessed" (Keller).



## INTRODUCTION:

"In a Peanuts cartoon strip by Charles Schulz, Lucy says to her little brother Linus, 'Boy, do I feel crabby.' 'Maybe I can help you,' Linus responds, always willing to be of assistance. 'Why don't you just take my place here in front of the TV while I go and fix you a nice snack? Sometimes we all need a little pampering to help us feel better.' Linus returns with a sandwich, chocolate chip cookies, and a glass of milk. 'Now,' he asks, 'is there anything else I can get you? Is there anything I haven't thought of?' Lucy takes the tray, saying, 'Yes, there's one thing you haven't thought of.' And then she screams, 'I don't wanna feel better!'"

**TEXT:** Philippians 4:4.

## DISCUSSION:

### 1. This is not a unique text.

- A. Psalm 32:11.
- B. Psalm 40:16.
- C. Psalm 68:3.
- D. Psalm 118:24.
- E. Psalm 149:2.
- F. Ecclesiastes 3:12.
- G. Ecclesiastes 11:8.
- H. Joel 2:23.
- I. 2 Corinthians 13:11.
- J. 1 Thessalonians 5:16.
- K. 1 Peter 4:13.

### 2. We need to wake up and appreciate the seriousness of happiness.

- A. Happiness is not an option. It is a command of God. If we don't do what this verse says, we sin. Unless we repent, we will lose our soul.
- B. Psalm 2:11.
- C. Happiness is not something we seek. Rather, it's something we find in seeking God. If we aren't happy, we have a problem in our relationship with God.
- D. We need to be happy, not for our sakes, but for God's sake. This is not a feel good lesson. This is a hard lesson on happiness. It's about God, not us. Our unhappiness reflects very poorly on God.
- E. Philippians 2:14-15.
- F. Philippians 3:1. "Finally," likely "from now on," "in the future."
- G. Yes, there are times to weep, medical problems, learning curves, but joy is *"the distinguishing atmosphere of the Christian life"*. We may put it this way—whatever be the ingredients of the Christian life, and in whatever proportions they are mixed together, joy is one of them. In the Christian life joy always remains a constant ... It has been said that 'Rejoice!' is the standing-orders of the Christian ... Every virtue and all knowledge is to be irradiated with joy; even the patience and the endurance which might well be bleak and grim are to be lit with joy ... There is no virtue in the Christian life which is not made radiant with joy; there is no circumstance and no occasion which is not illumined with joy. A joyless life is not a Christian life, for joy is the one constant in the recipe for Christian living" (Barclay).

### 3. We need to rejoice.

- A. *Really* rejoice. 1 Peter 1:8.
- B. Can we put our name in the following blank and the statement be true? "\_\_\_\_\_ rejoices with joy inexpressible and full of glory?"
- C. "We Americans have more to make life easy than any people who have ever lived. We live in the finest houses, wear the nicest clothes, and eat the best food that any generation has ever known; yet, at the same time, today we have more suicides, more divorces, more people in jail, more mental illnesses than any people of all time. For many people, life is a grim, desperate, unhappy affair" (Allen).
- D. How do we explain this?
  - 1) **We seek happiness in ways that don't produce happiness.** Materialism, hedonism, selfishness, escape, etc. Hebrews 11:25; Ecclesiastes 12:13.
  - 2) **We believe that happiness depends on things beyond our control.**

- 3) **We make it difficult to be happy.** Debt, procrastination, etc.
- 4) **We don't think about happiness.**
- 5) **We don't want to be happy.** Sally Van Pelt. Terri Clark's song, *I Just Want To Be Mad*, "Please don't make me smile, I just want to be mad for awhile."
- 6) **We are comfortable being miserable.** Weight analogy.
- 7) **We don't trust God.** We think He is commanding the impossible. We're not sure He'll keep His word. Psalm 33:21; Romans 15:13.
- 8) **We are violating our conscience.** 2 Chronicles 15:12, 15.
- 9) **We aren't keeping the two most important commands of all.** Mark 12:28-31.

#### 4. Happiness is a choice.

- A. **Regardless of why we are unhappy, we can be happy.** John 16:22.
- B. **The word of God teaches us how to be happy.** John 15:11; Psalm 19:8.
- C. **We can be happy in any circumstance.** 2 Corinthians 7:4; Philippians 2:17. How? Luke 10:20.
- D. "The condition of our blessedness, or happiness, is within ourselves. Our happiness does not depend upon what we have, but upon what we are; not upon our position, but upon our disposition; not upon the state of our circumstances, but upon the state of our soul" (Thomas)
- E. "He who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts and multiply the grief which he purposes to remove" (Samuel Johnson).

**APPLICATION:** For God's sake, let's be happy!

1. Psalm 35:9.
2. Isaiah 61:10.
3. *Exult*, "show or feel elation or jubilation."
4. Habakkuk 3:17-19.
5. "The word 'blessed' literally means: an inner joy that is untouchable by the world. The word 'happiness' is built on the word 'hap,' and literally means: chance. Human happiness is often dependent on the chances of life, over which so often man has no control. A sudden illness, a deep disappointment, the loss of some material blessing—one of many things can change happiness into sorrow. But when the Christian has God within his soul, nothing on earth can touch him ... Christ ... bring[s] blessedness to human life—a permanent joy" (Allen).

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. God clearly wants us to pray. Colossians 4:2A, "Devote yourselves to prayer." But *why* does God want us to pray?
2. God doesn't need anything from us. He certainly doesn't need our praise. Acts 17:24-25.
3. We don't have to talk God into giving us things. He loves us and wants to bless us even before we pray. Rom. 5:6-8.
4. We don't have to tell God what we need. He knows what we need better than we do even before we pray. Matthew 6:7-8. Thank God for unanswered prayers!
5. So *why* does God want us to pray?

**DISCUSSION:** God wants us to pray because ...

1. **Our sole purpose in life is to glorify God.**

- A. There are two contrasting motives in prayer. John 17:1; James 4:3.
  - B. We're sometimes perplexed by passages like John 15:7B, "Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you;" and 1 John 3:22A, "Whatever we ask we receive from Him." But, if our sole purpose in life is to glorify God, then it should become clear why our prayers will always be answered. John 15:7A; 1 John 3:22B. 1 Corinthians 10:31.
  - C. What's our motive in prayer? When Jesus prayed on earth the glory of His Father was His first object. Is this the case with us or are self-interest and self-will the real reasons we pray?
  - D. Consider as basic a request as, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Do we want God to give us bread that we might do what we want, or do we want God to give us bread that He might use us to accomplish what He wants? Those are two very real, very different motives.
2. **We need to power of God to glorify God.** We're sometimes perplexed by passages like 2 Corinthians 12:9, "Power is perfected in weakness;" and 2 Corinthians 12:10, "When I am weak, then I am strong." But Paul understood that his real source of strength was God, not Himself. In other words, Paul was saying that the more he appreciated his own weakness, the more he relied on the power of God, his only real source of strength. John 15:4-5; 2 Corinthians 3:5; Philippians 4:13.
3. **Prayer allows us to glorify God through the power of God.**

- A. God wants us to pray because prayer, done properly, focuses our minds on who God is and on our desperate need to deny ourselves and glorify Him through the power that He alone can supply.
- B. We must pray, not because God is unwilling to give if we don't ask, but because we are unable to receive if we don't ask as we ought.
- C. Prayer is for us, not God.
  - 1) God isn't an egotist. He doesn't need our adoration. But we desperately need to adore God and that's why we must pray—to stay in awe of God.
  - 2) God doesn't need to be talked into helping us, but we need to talk ourselves into allowing God to help us.
  - 3) God doesn't need us to tell Him what we want, but we need to acknowledge what He wants to do through us and what it will take for Him to do it.
- D. Illustrations.
  - 1) Emmaus. Luke 24:13-16, 31-34. Prayer is to us what talking to Jesus was to them. Study is to us what listening to Jesus was to them. By talking with Jesus, they finally saw Jesus for who He really is. Prayer does the same thing for us. And let's face it, we desperately need to keep our minds focused on Jesus and who He really is.
  - 2) Water analogies.
    - a. God's power flows to people who pray as they ought. Think of God as the source of the water and the water springing from the source as the power of God. Think of ourselves as dry reservoirs. Some things divert the power altogether. For example, prayerlessness. Some things divert some but not all of the power. For example, worry. Prayer, done properly, is what blocks unproductive drains of power and keeps the power of God flowing fully into us.
    - b. Walking on water. Matthew 14:22-33. Prayer is to us what talking to Jesus was to Peter. Study is to us what listening to Jesus was to Peter. By talking with Jesus, Peter mustered sufficient courage to get out of the boat and walk by faith. Prayer does the same thing for us. And, once again, let's face it—we spend far too much time focused on the winds of life and not near enough time on the giver of life who's promised us that if we'll let Him, He'll, one way or the other, quiet every storm of life we face.
    - c. Philippians 4:6-7. This doesn't happen because God somehow providentially "zaps" us with peace. Rather, it happens because in praying properly we put ourselves in the hands of the one and only, all knowing, all powerful, and all loving God and peace is simply the natural byproduct of such faith.
    - d. "Prayerless people cut themselves off from God's prevailing power, and the frequent result is the familiar feeling of being overwhelmed, overrun, beaten down, pushed around, defeated. Surprising numbers of people are willing to settle for lives like that. Don't be one of them. Nobody has to live like that. Prayer is the key to unlocking God's prevailing power in your life" (BH).
  - 3) People in crisis. There are no foxhole atheists because people in times of great crisis pray. A crisis makes people realize that they sometimes need God. Prayer makes people realize that they are in constant crisis and that need God every day just as surely as they need Him on a day when a loved one's life hangs in the balance.

- E. Why does God want us to pray? Not because He needs to hear from us, but because for several vital reasons we desperately need to be speaking with God.

## **APPLICATIONS:**

### **1. We must pray as God commands.**

- A. Matthew 6:9A; Ephesians 6:18A; Jude 1:20-21.
- B. If we don't pray as we ought, we won't get where prayer properly offered will take us, i.e. where we need to be to glorify God as we ought.
- C. There's quite a lot involved in praying as we ought.
- D. Proper study about all things is as essential to truly glorifying God as is proper prayer.

### **2. Adoration is an essential element of proper prayer.**

- A. There are basically four essential elements to prayer—adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. ACTS.
- B. By requiring these four elements, God asks and forces us to answer four questions each time we pray as we ought. Who am I? Who are you? What have I done for you? What do I want to do through you, what will it take for Me to get it done, and are you going to let me to do it?
- C. Adoration is the first thing we're taught to do when praying. Matthew 6:9. It sets the stage for all that follows. In adoration, "we breathe deeply the atmosphere of Eternity; and when we do that, humility and common sense are found to be the same thing. We realize, and re-realize, our tininess, our nothingness, and the greatness and steadfastness of God" (EU). Without adoration, God quickly becomes a mere means to our ends instead of the glorious end of all.
- D. Brethren, the prayers of the Bible are full of adoration. Revelation 5:6-14; Ephesians 3:0-21; etc. Yet, we hear very little adoration in our public prayers and that probably means there is very little of it in our private prayers.
- E. "Take first then, as primary, the achievement and maintenance of a right attitude toward God; that profound and awestruck sense of God's transcendent reality, that humbly adoring relation, on which all else depends. I feel no doubt that, for all who take the spiritual life seriously, this prayer of adoration exceeds all other types in educational and purifying power. It alone is able to consolidate our sense of the supernatural, to conquer our persistent self-occupation, to expand our spirits, to feed and quicken our awareness of the wonder and delightfulness of God ... In the flood tide of such adoring prayer, the soul is released from the strife and confusions of temporal life; it is lifted far beyond all petty controversies, petty worries, and petty vanities—and none of us escape these things. It is carried into God, hidden in God. This is the only way in which it can achieve the utter self-forgetfulness that is the basis of its peace and power and that can never be ours as long as we make our prayer primarily a means of drawing gifts to ourselves and others from God, instead of an act of unmeasured self-giving" (EU).

### **3. Are we praying as we ought?**

- A. We're not praying as we ought if we're ...
  - 1) *Not praying at all, or if we're not consistently praying.* Luke 5:16; 6:12; 18:1.
  - 2) *Not spending a great deal of time in prayer.*
    - a. To people in the fast lane, even the religious fast lane, prayer is something they quickly do so they can get on to more pressing concerns.
    - b. There is no more pressing concern. The more we need to do, the more we need to pray. Martin Luther, "I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily."
    - c. We cannot afford to sacrifice time with God in the service of God. Regardless of what we are doing, if we're too busy to spend much time in prayer, we are just too busy. Period.
    - d. We'll accomplish far more in less time if we'll just spend more time in prayer.
  - 3) *Not growing spiritually.*
    - a. Prayer, properly done, keeps us pushing the frontier of faith.
    - b. "To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ" (RF).
    - c. Apply to bad habits. If we are praying as we ought, we'll change. If aren't willing to change, we'll stop praying as we ought.
  - 4) *Not sharing effectually.* "Sometimes we are in such a hurry to transmit that we forget our primary duty is to receive; and that God's self-imparting through us, will be in direct proportion to our adoring love and humble receptiveness. Only when our souls are filled to the brim, can we presume to offer spiritual gifts to others. The remedy for that sense of impotence, that desperate spiritual exhaustion that religious workers too often know, is, I am sure, an inner life governed not by petition but by adoring prayer. ... It is only when our hearts are thus actually at rest in God, in peaceful and oblivious adoration, that we can hope to show God's attractiveness of others" (EU).
- B. If we're not praying as we ought, why aren't we praying as we ought? There are several secondary explanations - ignorance, self-centeredness, unwillingness to change, etc. Regardless, the real reason we're not praying as we ought is because the glory of God is not our highest priority. If it were, we'd know better, we'd put His agenda before our own, we'd be making changes not excuses, etc. Brethren, let's pray as we ought. God knows we need it. I hope after today's lessons we know it too.

## THE THREE KEYS TO DRESSING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

God wants “women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness” (1 Timothy 2:9-10 NASB).

Why does God care about the way we dress? Simple. Our clothing, or lack thereof, affects other people, sometimes profoundly. God wants to make sure our clothing affects people for good, not evil.

In 1 Timothy 2:9-10, God gives us three keys to dressing for spiritual success.

### 1. **MODESTY IS THE FIRST KEY TO DRESSING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS (1 Timothy 2:9).**

- A. Dressing “modestly” means “dressing or behaving so as to avoid impropriety or indecency, esp. to avoid attracting sexual attention.”
- B. The original Greek word is *aidos*. It means to dress with a “sense of shame,” i.e. with a keen awareness of and sensitivity to the importance of dressing with propriety or decency.
- C. Some people dress improperly because they have no shame. Christians should be too ashamed to ever dress improperly.
- D. A young woman once wore short shorts to an airport. She ran into a preacher she knew and was immediately ashamed of her clothing. If she had dressed with modesty, a sense of shame, she wouldn’t have bought the short shorts much less have worn them in public.
- E. Modesty or *aidos* “implies an innate moral repugnance to the performance of dishonorable acts ... *Aidos* ... is self-motivated and implies reverence for the good as good, not merely as that to which honor and reputation are attached ... Thus *aidos* ... would always restrain a good man from an unworthy act ... In 1 Timothy 2:9, *aidos* refers to that ‘shamefastness’ or modesty that shrinks from exceeding the limits of womanly reserve, as well as from the dishonor that would justly attach to doing so” (Trench).
- F. Why is modesty, a sense of shame, key to adorning ourselves with proper clothing? Because pleasing God must be our highest priority if we’re going to overcome such powerful influences as the fashion industry, our peers, our own personal preferences, etc.
- G. Unfortunately, modesty doesn’t govern how most people dress. In the early seventies, faithful preachers taught long and hard against miniskirts with little apparent effect. Yet, what happened when Paris decided that miniskirts were out and long skirts were in? Overnight, many “Christians” started adorning themselves with proper clothing. Clearly, pleasing God wasn’t their primary concern.
- H. ***What really governs the way we dress?***

### 2. **DISCREETNESS IS THE SECOND KEY TO DRESSING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS (1 TIMOTHY 2:9).**

- A. Dressing “discreetly” means being “careful, judicious, circumspect” in our choice of clothing.
- B. “Careful” means “done with or showing thought or attention.” “Judicious” means “having, showing, or done with good judgment or sense.” “Circumspect” means “to be watchful in all directions and with regard to all possible consequences.”
- C. The original Greek word is *sophrosune*. It means to dress with “*good sense* ... literally *soundness of mind* ... *sanity*” (Lenski). “Inherent in this ... word is the use of ‘good judgment’ in the matter of dress” (Fee).
- D. Why is discreetness, thought or attention, good judgment or sense, watchfulness in all directions, key to adorning ourselves with proper clothing? Because dressing for spiritual success requires us to THINK and THINK WELL.
- E. We can’t just “throw something on” and hope to dress properly. We must know what the Bible says about proper and improper clothing. We must wisely apply these principles. We can’t be naïve about the way our clothing, or lack thereof, affects other people. We must make sure our clothing will be modest in all situations. If we’re not sure something is proper, we must err on the side of caution. No matter how much we want to wear something, we can’t make excuses for improper clothing.
- F. ***Do we really think about what we wear?***

### 3. **PUTTING FAR MORE EMPHASIS ON INWARD THAN OUTWARD BEAUTY IS THE THIRD KEY TO DRESSING FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS (1 TIMOTHY 2:9-10).**

- A. Our text, 1 Timothy 2:9-10, is a “not, but” passage similar to John 6:27, “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.” In this passage, Jesus isn’t forbidding us to

work for food that feeds our bodies as required by 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Rather, Jesus is commanding us to work much harder for food that feeds our souls.

- B. Similarly, 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:3-4 don't forbid styling hair, wearing jewelry, or putting on expensive clothes. Rather, they teach us to put far more emphasis on good works than things like hair, jewelry, and apparel.
- C. God is not anti-fashion or anti-attractiveness. The excellent wife whose price was far above jewels wore clothing of fine linen and purple (Proverbs 31:10, 22). She rightly cared about her outward appearance, but she cared far more about her inward appearance (Proverbs 31:10-31).
- D. Why is putting far more emphasis on inward than outward beauty key to adorning ourselves with proper clothing? Because dressing for spiritual success requires more than modesty and discretion. It also requires us to keep clothes, even modest and discreet clothes, in their proper place. If we focus on adorning our body to the neglect of more important matters, we are still far from properly dressed.
- E. ***Are we really more concerned about the way we look inwardly or outwardly?***

## **BIBLE PRINCIPLES GOVERNING PROPER CLOTHING**

### **1. NAKEDNESS IS SHAMEFUL.**

- A. Before eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve "were both naked" and "not ashamed" (Genesis 2:25). Afterwards, "they knew they were naked; and sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings" (Genesis 3:7).
- B. Jesus advised the Laodiceans to buy from Him "white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed" (Revelation 3:18).
- C. Spiritual nakedness, like literal nakedness, is shameful.

### **2. GOD GAVE US ANIMALS AND PLANTS TO COVER OUR NAKEDNESS (HOSEA 2:9).**

### **3. NAKEDNESS IS INADEQUATE CLOTHING, NOT NECESSARILY NUDITY.**

- A. Why did Adam and Eve hide from the presence of the Lord? Even though they were wearing loincloths, they were still naked! Read Genesis 3:8-11.
- B. After meting out their punishment, "the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). To be modest, we must wear more than a loincloth. The garment God made "was a long covering from the shoulders to the knees. This was God's definition of being clothed" (*Christian Chronicle*).

### **4. OUR CLOTHING MUST BE PROPER IN ALL SITUATIONS.** "You shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it" (Exodus 20:26.) Our clothes should be modest when we bend over, sit down, cross our legs, lift our arms; when someone is standing over us, under us; etc.

### **5. WE CAN BE COVERED BUT STILL SHAMEFULLY DRESSED.** The principle is found in Genesis 38:14-15. Its application means we must not wear clothing that's transparent, too tight, etc.

### **6. WHAT WE SEE TREMENDOUSLY AFFECTS US.**

- A. After David saw Bathsheba bathing, he committed adultery with her, got her pregnant, and had her husband murdered to cover his sin. 2 Samuel 11:2-5, 14-17.
- B. After Herod saw his stepdaughter dance, he promised her up to half his kingdom. She got the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Mark 6:21-28.

### **7. IT'S SINFUL TO LOOK TO LUST.** Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Jesus takes looking to create desires we can't righteously fulfill very seriously. "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:29).

### **8. IT'S TEMPTING TO LOOK TO LUST.** God made women attractive to men and visa-versa. We can appreciate beauty without looking to lust, but it's a challenge. We need Job's determination. "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1).

### **9. WE MUST NOT TEMPT PEOPLE TO LOOK TO LUST.** We must not dress provocatively, in a way that arouses inappropriate sexual desire or interest. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!" (Matthew 18:6-7).

## 10. WE CAN KNOW WHAT TO COVER, HOW TO AVOID DRESSING PROVOCATIVELY, ETC.

- A. **The Bible tells us.** Exodus 28:42 (“Linen breeches ... such ... as worn by the Egyptians generally, reaching from the waist to a little above the knee ... Unto the thighs — *i.e.*, to the bottom of the thighs where they adjoin on the knee” (*Pulpit Commentary*); Ezekiel 16:7-10; John 21:7 (literally, “for he was naked”); etc.
- B. **Human nature tells us.** The Cedar Creek Corrections Center in Littlerock, Washington understands provocative clothing. Their visitor guidelines (Rev. 1/09) teach us much IF we are willing to learn. “Appropriate, modest clothing should be worn by all visitors. Buttons or closures should be fastened to the degree necessary to maintain modesty. All clothing must be clean and in good repair; free of holes, rips, or tears. Undergarments must be worn, to include briefs and brassieres for females, and briefs, boxers, or long underwear for males. Examples of inappropriate clothing include:
  - 1) Clothing that might expose undergarments, cleavage, stomach/midriff, bare back when arms are raised, or bare chest
  - 2) Tight fitting clothing
  - 3) Low cut tops or bottoms
  - 4) Clothing that is sheer, see through, or mesh (other than hosiery)
  - 5) Fish net stockings
  - 6) Camisole type/halter or tank tops, even if worn under other clothing ...
  - 7) Clothing referring to obscenity ... or sex in any form
  - 8) Wraparound clothing with full length openings
  - 9) Shorts, including culottes and cutoffs

Dresses, skirts, and slits in clothing must not fall more than 3 inches above the knee.”

- 11. **ERR ON THE SIDE OF SAFETY.** Clothing is either clearly modest, clearly immodest, or somewhere in between. If a mountain road doesn’t have a guardrail and it drops off 1,000 feet, sensible people drive as far from the edge as possible. Given the value of souls (Matthew 16:26), we must be even more conservative with our apparel. Sensible people wear clothes that are clearly modest. When in doubt, they don’t (Romans 14:23).

## 12. MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS.

- A. These principles apply equally to men.
- B. People desperately need good examples—set one!
- C. Parents, instill these principles in your children at the earliest possible age.
- D. Children, trust and appreciate your parents.
- E. Girls, your dad understands boys better than you do.
- F. Fathers, be firm.
- G. Mothers, support your husband.
- H. Drink and you may undress (Genesis 9:20-21; 19:30-36; Lamentations 4:21; Habakkuk 2:15).

**THERE’S NO EXCUSE FOR IMMODEST CLOTHING.** From Adam and Eve, people have tried to excuse the inexcusable. This has certainly been true of immodest clothing. Here are some common rationalizations.

- 1. **SOME PEOPLE WILL LUST AFTER US NO MATTER WHAT WE WEAR.** True, but some people will lust after us only if we wear immodest clothing. If we needlessly tempt people to lust, we are just as guilty as people who lust (Matthew 18:6-7). People trying not to lust need all the help they can get. We are our brother’s keeper.
- 2. **MODESTY IS DETERMINED BY CULTURAL STANDARDS.**
  - A. Without question, some things may be provocative in one culture but not in another culture. For example, once upon a time in America a woman’s exposed ankles were provocative. Today, we don’t give them a second thought.
  - B. However, given the way God has made men and women, it’s also without question that some things are provocative in all cultures, regardless of time or place.
  - C. Whether modesty is dictated by human nature or culture, Christians must not dress provocatively. They must respect the boundaries of human nature and not push the boundaries of cultural acceptability.
- 3. **IT’S A MATTER OF JUDGMENT.** Given the word of God and human nature, it’s not entirely a matter of judgment. However, when judgment is involved, we must still use good judgment. No, we don’t have to answer to other people in matters of judgment, but we will have to answer to God.

**4. NO ONE WILL LUST AFTER ME.**

- A. Don't be naïve. Let's take modern swimsuits for example. If we don't look twice at people at the pool or beach, that doesn't mean people don't look twice at us. Why is the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit edition so popular? Because people do look! And yes, even at us. All people are attractive to some people.
- B. Here's what's really happening. "The fact is that our generation has been so bombarded with sexual stimuli that we have about reached the condition described by Jeremiah ... we are not at all ashamed, neither can we blush (Jeremiah 6:15; 8:12). **It is not that we think nothing lustful; it is that we think nothing of the sinfulness of thinking lustfully**" (Sewell Hall).

**5. I HAVE TO WEAR IT TO PARTICIPATE, EXCEL, ETC.**

- A. Admittedly, some activities require immodest clothing. For example, if you want to be a Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader, you must dress provocatively. Does this mean Christians can be Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders? No, it means Christians can only participate in things that allow them to dress modestly.
- B. Yes, being a Christian means we can't do certain things. But, God promises us we'll do even better things (Mark 10:28-30). If we compromise, we lose far more than we can ever hope to gain (Matthew 16:26).
- C. Fortunately, some activities, if pushed, will accommodate modesty concerns. Modest uniforms may invite abuse (1 Peter 4:4), but they may also invite respect for the courage of our convictions and embolden less courageous people to stand with us for what's right.

**6. I HAVE TO WEAR IT TO ATTRACT MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX.**

- A. This is just not true. Modest apparel will attract people who are more interested in us as a person than a sex object, whose primary concern is pleasing God, etc.
- B. It's proper to say there are two different types of girls—the kind men want to date and the kind they want to marry. Both attract men's attention. A woman's clothing has much to do with the kind of attention she'll attract.

**7. IT'S TOO HOT TO BE MODEST.**

- A. God doesn't ask the impossible.
- B. "If the pioneer women of this country could wear long dresses, often with long sleeves, pantaloons, boots, and who knows what all else, what am I complaining about? They wore these things laundering and cooking over an open fire, working in the field, etc. I can certainly wear modest clothing when I have air conditioning, electric fans, stoves, and other such labor saving devices ... You can be sure, however, that if fashion designers tomorrow declared shorts, halters, cropped shirts, tube tops, etc. to be out of date and passé, such clothing would be abandoned in the blink of the eye, regardless of the weather" (Linda Cruz).
- C. If Saudi Arabian women can wear their outfits in the desert because they love Allah, then Christians who love God can dress modestly no matter how hot it may be.

**8. EVERYONE DRESSES THIS WAY.** Not people who want to go to heaven. "You shall not follow the masses in doing evil" (Exodus 23:2).

**9. STORES DON'T SELL ANY OTHER KIND OF CLOTHES.** Clearly, modesty is not the fashion industry's highest priority, but if we look hard enough we can find decent apparel. If not, people who want to please God learn to sew or find a seamstress so they will have modest clothing.

**10. I ONLY DRESS THIS WAY AROUND CLOSE FRIENDS.**

- A. Take modern swimsuits again.
- B. "Some justify the wearing of such if only done among the selected few and where there is a close tie of friendship ... A woman who feels that her husband's best friends surely will not lust after her while they are swimming or water skiing is rather naïve about the make-up of men. Normal men are just not made that way" (Robert Taylor).
- C. "The fact that close friends go swimming together is no insurance against lustful looking and against consequences even more serious. If anything, such practices are more dangerous among ... friends than among strangers. More than one wrecked marriage has been traceable to laxness of dress and excessive intimacy between couples" (Sewell Hall).

**11. I ONLY DRESS THIS WAY WHEN I'M AROUND PEOPLE I DON'T KNOW.** The mere fact that we're among strangers doesn't mean we can tempt them to lust. Christians have only one dress code.



## WHY SAVE SEX FOR MARRIAGE?

Let's face it. We live in a sex-crazed world. Popular culture scoffs when people even mention saving sex for marriage. But, when you look at the effects of rampant promiscuity, you have to wonder why people think abstinence is such a bad idea. Is it difficult? Yes. Is it impossible? Certainly not. Does true love wait? Absolutely.

I want to discuss why God commands us to save sex for marriage. I've got seventeen good reasons, each of which needs to be carefully and prayerfully considered. When we're through, I hope you'll see that God is wiser than men. I also hope you'll be well equipped to help other people, especially younger people, appreciate the wisdom of God in this matter.

So, why save sex for marriage?

### 1. IT IS BEST.

- A. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). This means that what God says is best. If saving sex for marriage weren't best, God wouldn't have told us to do it. Trust and obey Him! He knows and wants what's best for you.
- B. Yes, I know "because God says" is enough. But, I also appreciate that it helps to know *why* God says to save sex for marriage. No one spelled out the reasons for me when I was growing up. I really could have used this information. I hope what follows helps us all flee sexual immorality.

### 2. IT IS BEST EVEN IF YOU HAVEN'T WAITED.

While not waiting ruins some things and lessens the enjoyment of other things, for most things the effects of sexual immorality are cumulative. In other words, the more you sin the more damage you do. Admittedly, it's best to have always waited. But if you haven't always waited, the next best thing is to save sex for marriage from this moment on.

### 3. WAITING PROTECTS YOUR SOUL.

- A. There are many types of sexual immorality—fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, bestiality, etc. God takes all types of sexual immorality *very* seriously.
- B. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4). "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, ... nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites ... will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). "The ... sexually immoral ... shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8).
- C. While admitting it's best to wait, many think premarital sex isn't all that bad. But, it is all that bad. In fact, it's so bad on so many levels that our loving God will send us to hell if we don't repent of this devastating sin.

### 4. WAITING HONORS THE PROMISE YOU MADE TO GOD WHEN HE SAVED YOUR SOUL.

- A. If you are a Christian, you became one by giving your life to God.
- B. As a result, your "body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord ... Flee sexual immorality ... Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:13, 18-20).
- C. People who take their life back from God will suffer worst of all. "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Peter 2:20-21).

### 5. WAITING KEEPS YOU FROM SINNING AGAINST OTHER PEOPLE.

- A. Premarital sex is not a victimless crime. If you do it, you not only sin against God and yourself, but you also sin against your sexual partner. God takes such selfishness *very* seriously.
- B. "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 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

### 6. WAITING IS GOLDEN—IT'S TREATING PEOPLE THE WAY YOU WANT TO BE TREATED.

- A. Do you want your future spouse to wait for you? Then you should wait for your future spouse.
- B. Do you want the person who is currently dating your future spouse to take what rightfully belongs to you? Then you shouldn't take what rightfully belongs to someone else.

### 7. WAITING HELPS YOU EXERCISE SELF-CONTROL.

- A. It's far easier to never commit sexual immorality than to stop once you've started.

- B. In World War 2, married men were the most vulnerable to sexual transmitted diseases because they knew what they were missing.
  - C. When it comes to exercising self-control over your sexual desires, ignorance really is bliss. Give yourself a break and don't make fleeing sexual immorality more difficult than it has to be.
8. **WAITING PROTECTS YOUR BODY.** Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are rampant. There are many STDs besides AIDS and gonorrhea. Many are incurable. At best, they're nuisances. At worst, they're killers.
9. **WAITING PROTECTS YOUR MIND.**
- A. Premarital sexual experiences are vividly and permanently burned into our memories. We can call them to mind whenever we like, but we must not do so. "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).
  - B. It's just as wrong to look at pornography imprinted in our minds as it is to look at pornography printed on paper, film, DVDs, computers, etc. Mental pornography is especially bad because we can't throw it in the trash and be done with it. No, we have to carry this garbage with us the rest of our lives.
10. **WAITING TESTS THE HEARTS OF POTENTIAL MARRIAGE PARTNERS.**
- A. People who really love you will honor your decision to save sex for marriage. They are more concerned about you than your body.
  - B. People who push you to compromise are selfish, definitely not marriage material. If they give you an ultimatum, i.e. sex or it's over, let them go and move on. If they really cared about you they wouldn't make you choose.
  - C. And don't worry about your chances for marriage. While sexual purity may make you less appealing as a *dating* partner, it makes you more appealing as a *marriage* partner. Perhaps you've heard the expression, "There are the kind of girls you date and the kind of girls you marry." Most people, even those who are sexually active before marriage, still want to marry people who are sexually inexperienced.
11. **NOT WAITING MAKES IT HARDER TO ATTRACT A GOOD MARRIAGE PARTNER.**
- A. This is the flip side of the last point. If you push sexual immorality while dating, quality people won't tolerate it and will likely move on.
  - B. Even if you eventually learn from your mistakes, the question of past sexual indiscretions will inevitably arise. True confessions aren't necessarily deal breakers, but they can certainly complicate your chances.
12. **WAITING ALLOWS DATING TO TEST TRUE COMPATIBILITY.**
- A. We date to find someone to marry. If people have sex while dating, they tend to focus on the physical side of their relationship and mistakenly assume that sexual compatibility is the same as true compatibility. They quickly learn after marriage—after infatuation fades and sex becomes a much smaller part of their overall relationship—that they are definitely different things.
  - B. While dating, people should save sex for marriage so they can spend as much time as possible learning whether they are truly compatible.
  - C. And no, determining sexual compatibility is not like buying a pair of shoes. You don't have to try them on before you buy them to see if they will fit. Studies consistently prove that people who have sex before marriage are more likely to divorce than those who wait to have sex until after they are married.
  - D. The way to determine if two people are sexually compatible is to determine whether they are truly compatible. People who are the latter will be the former.
13. **WAITING MAKES IT EASIER TO END BAD RELATIONSHIPS.**
- A. The more physically involved you are with someone, the harder it becomes to end a relationship—even if it is a bad relationship. This is especially true if pregnancy is a part of the picture. Pregnancy is a poor reason to get married. Two wrongs don't make a right.
  - B. If you ever consider marriage because of pregnancy or the threat of pregnancy, please don't draw false conclusions from people at church who "had to get married" and had everything work out fine. First, they would be the first to tell you to wait. Second, some of these marriages are not as successful as you think. Third, for every success we see born out of this "necessity," there are many more failures we don't see. Why don't we see them? Because one or both of them no longer go to church!
14. **WAITING MAKES YOUR ONE AND ONLY FIRST TIME A WONDERFUL AND MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE.**
- A. There is only one first time. You will remember it for the rest of your life.
  - B. What would you prefer? A wonderful memory of your honeymoon that you love to recall, or a memory of losing your virginity some other way, perhaps in the back seat of a car somewhere with someone that is no longer a part of your life, the memory of which makes you feel dirty, guilty and ashamed every time it comes to mind.

- C. In whatever manner you lose your virginity before marriage, it will be a cheap substitute for losing your virginity on your wedding night to the person that you have promised to love, honor, and cherish till death do you part.
- D. Mark my words. If you have any conscience at all, if you spoil your one and only first time, you will regret it for the rest of your life.
- E. Some couples have premarital sex reasoning, “Well, we are going to get married anyway.” First, it’s still a sin. Second, it doesn’t always work out that way. Many people who “just know” they are going to get married don’t. You aren’t married until you are married. Third, you still spoil the uniqueness of your wedding night and that’s something you’ll always regret.

15. **WAITING ALLOWS YOU TO GIVE YOUR SPOUSE AN AMAZING WEDDING GIFT ON YOUR WEDDING NIGHT.** For many reasons, one of the greatest gifts a husband can ever give his wife, and a wife can ever give her husband, is his or her virgin body on their wedding night.

16. **WAITING PROTECTS YOUR FUTURE SEXUAL SATISFACTION.**

- A. God is not against all sex. While He’s definitely anti-sexual *immorality*, He is very much pro-sexual *morality*. The first command God gave humans was to a husband and wife when He told them to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28).
- B. God wants people to have great sex lives. Proverbs 5:18-19 might make you blush, but here’s the will of God, “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth ... let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love” (Proverbs 5:18-19). Have you ever read the Song of Solomon? It will definitely make you blush and it says exactly the same thing.
- C. One reason why God wants people to save sex for marriage is so they’ll have the best possible sex during marriage. Sex before marriage adversely affects sex within marriage.
- D. If you wait, your honeymoon will be special, you won’t unfavorably compare your spouse to past sexual partners, you won’t fear that your spouse is unfavorably comparing you to past sexual partners, you won’t shortcut foreplay and its attendant intimacy and satisfaction by fantasizing about past sexual experiences (this is one reason why all forms of pornography are so damaging to marriages), etc.
- E. Before marriage be wise and think about what you hope will be a fulfilling, decades long, monogamous sexual relationship with your spouse and reject fleeting premarital sexual encounters that do nothing but harm the marriage bed!

17. **WAITING PROTECTS YOU FROM UNWANTED PREGNANCY.**

- A. Even if you only do it once, pregnancy is an inherent risk of sexual intercourse. The only 100% sure form of birth control is abstinence. People who still have a conscience about sex before marriage are particularly susceptible to the risk of pregnancy because they usually don’t premeditate sexual immorality.
- B. By itself, the fear of pregnancy is devastating even if it is never realized.
- C. Now imagine finding out that you are pregnant or that you have gotten someone pregnant. Imagine telling your father, mother, grandparents, brothers and sisters, friends. Imagine having to confess your sins before God and your church. Imagine your father having to decide that it’s now best for him to resign from a leadership position in your congregation. Imagine having to decide what you ought to do. Get married? Not get married? Put the child up for adoption? Quit school? Get a job?
- D. You are only young once and it should be a wonderful time of life. “Rejoice, O young man in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth” (Ecclesiastes 11:9A). The moment you learn the pregnancy test is positive your youth is over. It’s time to grow up. Sadly, few make this transition immediately and it’s usually the child who suffers because of their parents’ immaturity.
- E. Children don’t choose to be born. Raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord is difficult enough under the best of circumstances. Children have a right to be brought into this world by two people who are unconditionally committed to God, one another, and them.
- F. If you aren’t married, you aren’t ready to have children and therefore not ready to have sex – period! ***Having sex before you are ready to have children is one of the most selfish things you can possibly do.***

***For these and even more good reasons, trust God and save sex for marriage!***

**HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?**

- 1. For Christians, everyone agrees that sexual intercourse before marriage is sinful. The real question for Christians is when does physical contact cross the line from something that is proper and good to something that is improper and evil. As we are about to see, sexual purity requires much more than simply abstaining from unlawful sexual intercourse.
- 2. The Bible permits people who are not married to touch each other as a sign of affection, but not if it stimulates sexual desire. Romans 16:16; Matthew 5:27-30.
  - A. Obviously touching some things is inherently off limits to people who are not married (reproductive organs, breasts, buttocks, etc.).

- B. But, you have to be very careful about any touching because any touching can start out impure or very quickly become impure.
  - C. What about kissing? Your kisses should reveal your heart, not your hormones. If you are intent on pleasing God, your kisses will be very, very brief. Kissing can very quickly pass from purity to impurity. French kissing is certainly off limits.
  - D. What about hugging?
  - E. What about dancing?
  - F. Before touching someone other than your spouse, you must ask two questions. First, why do I want to do it? Second, what effect would it have on me and/or the person I would touch? If the stimulation of sexual desires is the answer to either question, we shouldn't start and if it becomes the answer after we start, it is past time to stop.
3. Admittedly, this is very conservative. But, I believe this is what we must do to be sexually pure AND to have any realistic hope of saving sex for marriage. Very few people who indulge in touching that arouses sexual desire stop before it ultimately leads to sex. Why? Because the passions aroused by such touching are very strong and they scream for satisfaction in sex. Proverbs 6:27-28. Sexual desire is a fire that no one can afford to flame if they want to abstain from unlawful sexual intercourse.

### HOW DO WE KEEP OURSELVES PURE?

1. **Resolutely make up your mind that you are going to do it.** It won't happen by accident or half-hearted effort.
2. **Resolutely make up your mind that you are going to do it God's way.** That's the only way it will happen.
3. **Keep your mind pure.** Fill it with pure things. Don't look at, listen to, or read things that create desires you can't scripturally fulfill.
4. **Choose your friends very, VERY carefully.** 1 Corinthians 15:33.
5. **Reject the prevalent idea, even among many church members, that sexual foreplay is inevitable before marriage.** It is difficult, but doable. God does not command the impossible. 1 Corinthians 10:13.
6. **Decide what you will and will not do prior to associating with members of the opposite sex and then steadfastly resist the temptation to compromise your standards once you start.** If you think your standards are too strict, the time to change them is not in the heat of the moment, but later on when you have a cool head and a prayerful heart.
7. **Spell out your boundaries to the people you date very clearly and very early in a relationship.**
  - A. Don't expect people to read your mind. Don't be embarrassed or afraid. If it turns people off, you are better off without them. Stick to your guns. Some people stick around just for the challenge of trying to get you to compromise your standards.
  - B. Some advantages. First, you have less room to maneuver when tempted. Second, you give the other person an opportunity to help you maintain your boundaries. Third, it helps the other person not feel personally rejected. It's not personal, it's your personal morality.
8. **Avoid temptation.**
  - A. When it comes to sexually purity, the most critical thing is not what you are going to do when you are tempted, but what you are going to do so you won't even be tempted. The temptations of sexual impurity are so strong that we must avoid them whenever possible. Proverbs 5:8; 7:24-27.
  - B. Applications. Only date *real* Christians. Always strive to be around other people. When the two of you are alone, make yourself accountable to someone else for your location and conduct. Never "park." Never be home alone. If you are in a room alone, keep the door open. Separate if parents fall asleep. Don't assume parents won't allow you to do things that aren't in your best spiritual interest. Be very thankful if you have parents who don't trust you and give you very little rope.
9. **Flee temptation.** Genesis 39:11-12; 1 Corinthians 6:18.
10. **Pray.** This keeps the need for sexual purity fresh in your mind and secures the providential help of God. Pray privately and with the person you are dating.
11. **Ask your friends, parents, and brethren to pray for you and to hold you accountable.** James 5:16.
12. **Always tell the truth.**
13. **Follow good rules of thumb.** Do what Jesus would do. Don't do anything you would be embarrassed to do in front of the Lord, your parents, elders, preacher, etc. Don't do anything you don't want the person you will eventually marry to be doing. Don't do anything you don't want the person who is with the person you will eventually marry to be doing. Don't try to get as close to the line between right and wrong as possible. This is a sure way to end up getting burned. Instead, stay as far away as possible so there is as little risk as possible of ever crossing the line.
14. **If you compromise your standards, don't give up.** Rather, admit your mistake, repent, obtain forgiveness, and press on knowing that sexual purity will make things better and more sexual impurity will only make things worse.