

Sexual Morality and Social Change

Colossians 2:20-3:14

We live today in the midst of a “feel-good” society, meaning that some rules, guidelines, traditions and “code of conduct” are no longer adhered to. A society where, in a lot of instances, “rights rule over and above righteousness as outlined in the Bible.”

Our author of this lifestyle priority study states, “Though many refuse to admit it, Christians have become more and more like the world in their sexual standards.” He states that he wrote a book once on sexuality, that help some, but it did little to stem the tide of Christians choosing the path of sexual gratification, even though it often involves sin.

We need to live holy lives and renew a pure, joyful, respectful view of sexuality in the midst of today’s feel-good society.

Before diving into this lesson, there are a few definitions that I need to point out:

Sexuality—(noun) capacity for sexual feeling; a person’s identity in relation to the gender or genders to which they are typically attracted; sexual activities.

Asceticism—(noun) severe self-discipline and avoidance of all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons.

Mysticism—(noun) belief that union with or absorption into the Deity or the absolute, or spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect, may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender; belief characterized by self-delusion or dreamy confusion of thought, especially when based on the assumption of occult qualities or mysterious agencies.

Gnosticism—(noun) belief that matter and especially the body is evil in itself and cannot be redeemed from its evil ways. Because of that it might as well do whatever it wants.

As we look at our study, Paul’s writing to the Church at Colosse was to combat errors in the church and to show that believers have everything they need in Christ. The Book of Ephesians focuses on the church being the body of Christ, but Colossians focuses on Christ being the head of the Church. The blueprint of the book is 1) What Christ has done (1:1-2:23) and 2) What Christians should do (3:1-4:18).

Themes of Colossians:

- a) Christ is God. He is God in the flesh, Lord of all creation. Because Christ is supreme, our lives must be Christ-centered.
- b) Christ is the head of the Church. Because Christ is God, he is the head of the Church, his true believers. Christ is the founder, the leader, and highest authority on earth. To acknowledge Christ as our head, we must welcome his leadership in all we do or think.
- c) Union with Christ. Because our sin has been forgiven and we have been reconciled to God, we have a union with Christ that can never be broken. We should live in constant contact and communication with God.
- d) Man-made religion. False teachers were promoting a heresy that stressed self-made rules (legalism). We must not cling to our own ideas and try to blend them into Christianity. Nor should we let our hunger for a more fulfilling Christian experience cause us to trust in a teacher, a group, or a system of thought more than in Christ Himself.

Paul was telling the Colossians as well as believers everywhere: not philosophy, but Christ; not legalism, but Christ; not Judaism, but Christ; not angels or the tradition of men, but Christ.

Question 1. What attitude toward sexual things was evident in your home or in your church when you were growing up?

Read Colossians 2:20-23.

Question 2. What did Paul warn his readers about in this passage?

Answer: In Chapter 2, Paul warns believers to avoid philosophy (the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence) and legalism (excessive adherence to law or formula (rights); dependance on moral law rather than on personal religious faith), but to follow Christ. The Colossians had been set free from sin and from legalistic requirements, but they still lived as though they belonged to the world.

Question 3. Why was this kind of behavior so exasperating to Paul?

Answer: Because following all the rules and things listed in this passage have “no value” against the fleshly indulgence. We can’t reach up to God by following good rules (works). God reaches down to us through the works of Christ.

Question 4. What examples do you see of legalistic behavior among Christians today?

Answer: Christians today are tempted to live by legalistic rules against which they can check themselves, pat themselves on the back, and declare themselves “unworldly.” This system leads to pride. On the other hand, many Christians today rationalize all kinds of self-indulgence in the name of Christian freedom. But extremes are sinful worldliness.

Read Colossians 3:1-14

Question 5. What corrective did Paul offer to help us avoid the extremes of self-denial and self-indulgence (verse 1-3)?

Answer: Seek those things which are above. Set our minds on things above, not on things on earth. Consider our lives hidden (concealed, safe) in Christ.

Question 6. What does this passage suggest about the relationship between your thought life and your actions?

Answer: Both should line up to what pleases God. We should put off or put to death the things listed.

Question 7. Verses 5-14 are like an owner’s manual with directions for living the Christian life. The manual lists some things Christians are to “put to death” and get rid of. What are they?

Answer: Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, covetousness. Also verse 8: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication and lying (vs. 9)—King James.

Question 8. How would you categorize the sins listed in verse 5? What is common to all the sins in the second list in verses 8 and 9?

Answer: The first list in Colossians 3:5 falls into the general category of immorality or sins of sexual attitude and behavior. The second list describes sins of speech. Both lists describe sins that break relationships. The Hebrew-Greek Study Bible (KJV) uses the word *porneia* (4202) for fornication that includes all sexual sins among unmarried or married including adultery, homosexuality, incest, harlotry, etc.

Question 9. Take a few moments of silence to reflect privately on the characteristics of the earthly nature in verse 5-9. Which of these is a problem for you? Silently confess to God and seek help to set your heart and mind on his kingdom.

Answer:

Question 10. The “owner’s manual” continues in verses 12-14 with the positive things a Christian should do to put faith into action. How might the way Paul addressed his readers in verse 12 have motivated them to follow these directions ?

Answer:

Question 11. In what ways has God helped you to grow in one or more of these areas of godliness? Which do you need the most help with?

Question 12. Why do you think the sexual mores of society have such a great influence on Christians?

Lifestyle Reflections

“It’s unreasonable, unnecessary, and even unhealthy,” says today’s society about the sort of commitment to a lifetime relationship that Christian marriage demands. Homosexuality is viewed as a viable alternative to heterosexuality. It seems that any expression of sexuality is acceptable—except self-discipline, obedience to biblical principles, sexual abstinence before marriage, and faithfulness to one’s marriage partner. On the other hand, most Christian pastors (if they speak about sex at all) denounce premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, and divorce. In spite of this, the sexual behavior of Christians is approaching the point of being statistically indistinguishable from that of non-Christians.

God has called us to lives of holiness. Jesus prayed that we might be left in the world but be delivered from the Evil One. In our sexual behavior we, as a Christian community, need to be in the world but delivered from its skewed thinking and shallow standards.

Do we, Christians, have any real distinctives? How can we live differently in this area?

References: Lifestyle Priorities Living with Purpose in a Fast-Paced World, Fisherman Bible Study Guides, WaterBrook Press; New American Study Bible; The Amplified Bible; The Opened Bible, KJV.