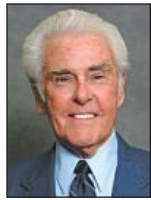


Distinct in my relationships

In this lesson series, distinct means “living above the norm.”

When Jesus teaches about sexual



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purity in his lifetime, he was challenging his listeners to live above two lifestyles. One was the legalism of the Jewish law that dominated the synagogue attendees who were in his audience. The other

was the sexual laxity of the Greco-Roman Empire that influenced attitudes in all cultures represented in the environment in which Jesus lived and taught.

Purity begins in one’s religious and sexual development.

In the New Testament, the person who is in a right relationship with God is to live a life of purity. For example, Paul writes to Timothy, “shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22, RSV). Jesus places the source of purity in the heart in our text also.

Contemporary changes in sexual development have encouraged persons to get in touch with their basic sexual identity, especially if it is different from their bodily representation of maleness or femaleness. Even though the Bible does acknowledge singleness for some individuals, this focus on discovering one’s authentic identity is a very different challenge for our Christian approach to such persons. Legal decisions have increased the tension for Christians who believe that these decisions have gone far beyond biblical possibilities.

However, it is psychologically affirming for individuals to be able to know their sexual identity for successful life in marriage, vocation and parenthood. This is especially true for couples in male/female marriages as they fulfill their understanding of God’s plan for them to be sexual persons in their married life even after age may diminish capability for sexual

relationships. Being pure remains important in their relationship to God.

Purity is to control the behavioral expression of one’s sexuality. “I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (5:28). The comment by A.M. Hunter, New Testament scholar, is significant for our understanding of Jesus’ statement: “The man in question looks on the woman in order to lust after her.”

This is not the spontaneous arousal resulting from seeing a virtually nude woman in the annual swimsuit issue of Sports Illustrated or a woman’s exposed anatomy because of her type of clothing. It is “the deliberate intent to sin.” Lack of opportunity may restrain him from actual sin; but in intention he has already committed the act” (A Pattern for Life, p. 48).

Unfortunately, too many men are aroused by their desires for adolescent or teenage girls whom they deceive into sexual relations. This behavioral action does not mean that sexual desire in itself is wrong or sinful because God built it into our natures. However, perverted expression of it is sinful.

Maintain faithfulness in marriage (Matt. 5:31-32). Faithfulness to marital commitment is magnified by Jesus in his adaptation of Old Testament attitudes toward divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-3. Two rabbinic schools held opposite and extreme reasons for permitting divorce. “The school of Hillel believed that a man could divorce his wife for almost any reason.... The school of Shammai gave adultery as the only reason for divorce” (Johnnie C. Godwin, “Mark,” pp. 82, 183). “Roman law permitted a woman to divorce her husband,...but in Jewish law the act of divorce remained as the husband’s act.” In Jesus’ comments on Jewish divorce, he “made no distinction between husband or wife, male and female. So Jesus elevated the status of women to that of man’s, regardless of what Jewish law had taught” (p. 84).

Jesus’ answer to the question

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Scripture: Matthew 5:27-32

about reasons for divorce includes the exception clause, “except on the ground of unchastity” (5:32, RSV), which is also in Matthew 19:9 but not in Mark 10:12, Luke 11:18 or 1 Corinthians 7:11. Based on these other New Testament references, Jesus did not agree with Hillel or Shammai. A.W. Argyle (The Gospel According to Matthew, p. 52) declares that “unchastity was the only possible ground for divorce because it destroyed the unity between man and wife” established in Genesis 2:24).

The consequences of divorce according to Jesus are significant. The first statement makes the divorced woman an adulteress (if she has not already become one in the marriage) but divorce does not by itself make her an adulteress. A man marrying a divorced woman has been affected by the sin of the first husband who divorced her even if she was innocent.

Against the backdrop of the conflicting convictions about divorce in the Bible, the reality is that we are living in a culture where divorce is far too common to identify with specific biblical statements about its future. We are dependent on the grace of the God who loves us to give us opportunity for a forgiven future in order to create a new life.

Philip Yancey gives us guidance in this matter. “Jesus did not proclaim the Sermon on the Mount so that we would...frown our brows in despair over our failure to achieve perfection. He gave it to impart to us God’s Ideal toward which we should never stop striving, but also to show that none of us will ever reach the Ideal.... Having fallen from the absolute Ideal, we have nowhere to land but in the safety net of absolute grace (The Jesus I Never Knew, p. 140).

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