

The Superior Pleasure of Purity

The human heart is hungry. It is a desire factory that endlessly thirsts for things to fill it. God made the heart this way – to desire, to thirst, to long for fulfilment. The tragedy of the fall of Adam is that man chose to fill up his hungry heart with things that God created, instead of God Himself. This is the essence of sin – man turning from the glory of God to find joy in God's gifts, apart from God. Man turning from the excellence of God to seek joy in disobeying God's commands.

One obvious area in which this has happened is the area of sexuality. A wonderful gift – created by God for man to enjoy even before the Fall, has been warped. Man now seeks to enjoy this gift without reference to God. He wants to enjoy it as an end in itself. He wants to enjoy it apart from God's commands. He wants to enjoy it in rebellion to God.

God's commands for the use of His gift of sex was simple – we find it in **Genesis 2:24**: *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”*

The plan is simple but beautiful – one man and one woman in marriage, enjoying each other without shame for a lifetime. The command was, and is, simple. It is man who has complicated it with his sin. Man has warped this simple command into premarital sex, into adultery, into incest, into self-sex, into pornography, into rape, into child molestation, into all kinds of perversions clearly forbidden by God.

The sad thing about this state of affairs is that man refuses God's plan, which is good, to pursue his own – but his own plan is self-destructive. Pre-marital sex ruins relationships and affects marriages negatively. Adultery breaks up homes. Self-sex and pornography warp sex in selfishness and bring the mind and body into bondage. Rape is an act of murder against another soul. Child molestation scars people for life.

All sexual sin brings the painful, soul-destroying feeling of guilt. It is patently obvious that warping God's design does not ultimately work in our favour – it harms us. So why does man take what was meant to be a good gift and pervert it? I mean, if something is great, beautiful and meant for your benefit, why change it? Why pursue something that is ultimately less in value and pleasure than what God designed, and has the additional factor of negative consequences? The answer is: unbelief.

Unbelief, because man did not and does not believe in God's plan for sexuality. He does not trust the goodness of God, and does not believe the promise of God with regard to sexuality. So, he follows what his heart believes to be true. He pursues a plan outside of God's plan, because his heart is hungry, and he is pursuing his joy.

The problem is not that he is pursuing joy or pleasure, it is his unbelief. The problem is that he rejects God's instruction in unbelief, for his own wisdom or the world's. See, here is the dilemma: you will always ultimately follow the strongest desire in your heart. You may try to ignore that desire, or cover it up, or distract yourself from it, but you can never ultimately get away from it. Your heart seeks its joy.

So the problem is not desire, nor is it pleasure-seeking. Some think the answer to sexual sin is to teach the endless denial of those desires. There certainly is a place for self-denial, but as we will see, it is mixed with faith. The real problem is not the desires we have, since they are God-given. The problem is the pursuit of those desires in unbelief. The solution, then, is the opposite: faith.

Faith – to instead believe God's promises, and trust that they are superior. This is the way to victory over sexual sin. See, unless your desire for God's alternative overcomes your desire for sin's alternative, you will

always give in to sin. Since we always follow our strongest desire – we have to get to a place where our desire for the pleasure God offers us overcomes our desire for what sin offers us.

This is true self-denial – I deny myself the all-too easy offer of sin in front of me, and I pursue with all my heart the greater and superior joy God has for me. This is the nature of faith. Faith comes to God and embraces all that He has for us, and turns away from what sin promises.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

In other words, faith is the act of coming to God, believing objectively that He exists, but subjectively that *He is good to me* – a rewarder, a blessing to those who go after Him diligently. Like Abraham, we embrace the future promise as good enough for present tense contentment and satisfaction.

Faith in God's plan for sex is the key to overcoming sexual sin. See, there is a real reason why faith is what overcomes sin – because anything else will not give the glory to God, and so it will lack the power of God.

If it was your self-discipline that overcame sexual sin in your life, then you get the glory as a self-disciplined person, not God. If it was your sense of morality that overcame sexual sin in your life, then you get the glory as a moral person, not God. If it was your desire for a good reputation that overcame sexual sin, then your reputation gets the glory, not God.

The thing that glorifies God is faith. Because faith says, 'God, you do the work. You be the power. You be the righteousness.' Faith says, 'God, Your way is better. God, You are honest and true. God, Your plan for sexuality is the best. You are trustworthy.'

See, if it is not God who does the work, then it is our works. If it is our works, then it is not grace. As **Romans 11:6** says, "*And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*" Grace and works don't mix – because God won't share the glory with anyone else. So, for God to get all the glory, it has to be totally His work. Paul explains this in Galatians:

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Galatians 2:20-21

Notice Paul says he now lives simply by faith in Christ. The very next verse tells us why – because he does not want to frustrate or nullify the grace of God. He does not want to be in competition to God's work in him, so he simply yields to God's work in him by faith. Interestingly, in the very next verse, Paul moves from his personal testimony to apply it to the Galatians: "*This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*"

Put simply, Paul is saying, 'You are supposed to live the Christian life the same way you got it – by turning away from your own works, and yielding yourself to God's righteousness by faith. Faith is the key to righteousness, both in salvation, and in sanctification.'

Faith is also the thing that brings about the control of the Holy Spirit. Looking to God in faith, embracing His promises and treating them as true and superior to the promises of sin, brings about the control of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who makes holiness possible in our lives. Since I will only have victory by the power

of the Spirit, and the Spirit only controls me when I look to Him in faith – this is another clear reason why faith is the key to overcoming sexual sin in our lives.

Faith is the medium through which grace comes to our souls; grace is the actual thing that brings holiness. Now – how does this faith look when it comes to the battle against sexual sin? It looks like this: by faith, I believe in the superior pleasure of purity. By faith, I embrace the promises of God as superior, as more pleasurable, as more desirable than the promise of sin.

We said that one always follows the strongest desire in the heart. Faith says, ‘More than sin, I want God’s holy alternative. More than the pathetic, disappointing, guilt-producing and life-scarring actions of sexual sin, I want God’s enjoyable, guilt-free, holy version of sexuality.’ We cut sin’s power off by believing by faith that God’s way is better.

So then it follows that we need to dig into the Word of God to see why God’s alternative of ‘one man and one woman waiting for each other in purity till marriage’ is a superior pleasure. **Romans 10:17** tells us, “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”

The Word of God kindles our God-given faith. Hearing God’s promises of pleasure and goodness in His plan, and indeed warnings of negatives for disobeying, stirs up our faith to believe in the superior pleasure of purity. Go with me into the Word, and see the superior pleasure of purity. See how this unfolds in God’s promises.

1. Promise: Purity provides undivided joy in marriage

“Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.”

Proverbs 5:15-19

Now the first thing you notice there is the pleasure-filled language God employs to describe a pure marital bed. The words are dripping with absolute joy and pleasure: ‘blessed,’ ‘rejoice,’ ‘lovely,’ ‘graceful,’ ‘delight,’ ‘intoxicated with love.’ Now, does that sound like God is saying, ‘Please restrain yourselves. Too much happiness is harmful for you. A bit of joy is okay, but don’t go overboard, or I’ll stop you’? No – it’s the very opposite!

God says, ‘Let your fountain be blessed – let it be extremely happy. Celebrate your marital love physically. Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Consider her extremely lovely and graceful. Let the sight of her fill you with delight, and let the very experience of her fill you at all times with delight. Rejoice!’

This doesn’t seem to speak of a God who is rather detached from our sexual joy, who objects to us enjoying what He has placed within us. To top it all off, he commands that you be so caught up in the marital bed, that it is as if you are drunk with her – you have had too much, and it is overwhelming you, you are losing control.

Now, I understand this language is graphic. But God is going to great lengths to emphasise that He is not out to spoil our fin – He is there to preserve it. The unspoiled marital bed is clearly the highest pleasure of sexual love possible. Notice how God explains what will spoil this joy: “*Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.*”

That is clear – what will spoil the marriage bed is a dividing up of the sexual devotion and attention. God is picturing sexual desire like a fountain. He says that to engage in sexual sin is as if you are taking that precious fountain, breaking open its structure, and letting the water run out into the street. Sexual love in marriage is like a fountain – it replenishes itself, it draws from itself, and takes in again and grows in intensity.

Sexual sin instead divides the heart. The great joy of God's plan is the sense of focus. It is an intense focus on one person for life – and only with an intense focus, can you have intense satisfaction. Sexual sin destroys this focus by dividing it onto a number of people that you will never marry. Instead of that intense pleasure of desire for one that is satisfied, you have a dulled and diluted joy, due to your desire being spread onto numerous people.

God is saying that superior pleasure is in His plan, where your fountain is blessed – one person for life. He wants us to have undivided joy – without regrets, painful memories, guilt and other baggage. He is not destroying your pleasure in commanding us to wait in purity for our marriage partner – He is preserving it. He is telling us that sexual sin will destroy our joy, not gain it.

For the record, I have never met a couple who waited for each other in marriage, then turned around and said, "I wished we hadn't waited. We really cheated ourselves." On the other hand, I have known people who did not wait, who said, "I wish we had waited. We really cheated ourselves." Faith in this promise is the belief that purity is a superior pleasure.

2. Promise: Purity provides an unmatched intimacy with God

Now it doesn't take a genius to figure out that sexual sin destroys your fellowship with God. The guilt nags at you, you shy away from God, and your spiritual life declines. The promise of purity is that you can enjoy the gift of sexuality in the Lord. That might sound a bit shocking at first– but is sexuality not God's gift? Therefore, when sexuality is practiced according to God's plan, it can be enjoyed without shame – knowing that God approves, and indeed, delights in it.

In the Song of Songs, we have the story of Solomon courting the Shunnamite girl. Eventually, the day of the wedding occurs, and chapter 4 and 5 records their wedding night. After Solomon praises his bride, she invites him to consummate the marriage. **Song of Solomon 5:1** ends with an interesting phrase: *"Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."*

These could not be the words of Solomon, nor those of his bride, nor the words of the daughters of Jerusalem, since they wouldn't be present in such a private setting. Who says it? Most likely: God Himself. God says to the bridal couple. 'Eat, O friends, yea, drink abundantly. Enjoy My gift in Me, to the fullest.' See, the tragedy of sin is the fact that it pursues pleasure by sacrificing the greatest pleasure: God.

Sin, by its very nature – makes an exchange – pleasure outside God instead of pleasure in God. Sexual sin can never be enjoyed as an act of thanksgiving toward God. But sex in marriage – purity – can be enjoyed with God, as an act of love toward God, as an increasing act of holiness. Sexuality as God has it can direct my soul to God as I think of Him as the wonderful source of a wonderful gift.

Here is the beauty part: In Ephesians, Paul speaks on marriage, saying, *"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church,"* (**Ephesians 5:31-32**). The man and wife are actually involved in a wonderful roleplay. The man is playing the role of Christ; the woman the role of the church.

When we pursue the pleasure of purity – we experience in part this union that is still to come in the future. That union, which will be indescribably pleasurable, is tasted only by those who follow God’s plan of sexuality. Because if you sin sexually, you ruin the image. Christ does not have many brides, just one. Christ is waiting for us, His bride, and if we do not wait – we are ruining the image.

Ephesians says that God will present us a chaste bride to Himself, so when we lose our purity – we are ruining the image. God takes this seriously: Moses was forbidden from entering the Promised Land because he ruined an image. He was told to strike the rock: a picture of Christ, stricken for our sins, then providing living water. But Moses struck the rock twice, which ruined the portrait, since Christ was not struck twice for our sins. Ruining the image of Christ and the church is what we do when we pursue sexuality away from God’s plan, and so we rob ourselves of unsurpassed joy.

God wants us to experience in the marital bed, a profoundly spiritual experience – a foretaste of that day. Augustine said: *“He loves Thee too little, who loves anything together with Thee, which he loves not for Thy sake.”* We can love sexuality for God’s sake – but only if we embrace the promise of purity. Only in God’s plan, can we enjoy sexuality as part of our walk with God – not in opposition to it.

Matthew 5:8 says: *“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”* Truly, when you follow God’s plan for sexuality – you enhance your walk with God – you grow your intimacy with God. That’s the superior pleasure of purity.

3. Promise: Purity provides joy of a God-glorifying body

The Bible describes our body as a tent. That’s because it’s temporary. It will one day be folded up, our soul and spirit departing to be with God and await the resurrection of our glorified body. But this much is true – when we dwell in dirty, untidy circumstances, it has an effect on us – a negative effect. The same is true of our bodies. When we defile our bodies sexually, our souls feel like you feel when you have to sit in a place that is dirty, wretched and smells bad. Paul speaks of this in Corinthians:

Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

1 Corinthians 6:18

When you commit sexual sin – you effectively dirty your own house. Paul then takes it a bit further, pointing out that you are not the only one living in that house: *“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”*

See, the sense of a loss of intimacy with God is related to the fact that if we sin sexually as Christians, the Spirit dwelling within us is grieved. We are defiling a Holy Place with unholiness. The feeling of defilement and disloyalty to Christ is crushing. On the other hand – consider the superior pleasure of purity is in the next verse: *“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

Purity allows us to have a God-glorifying body. What kind of body is that? One filled with godly contentment and self-control. What kind of body glorifies God? The kind that is addicted to sexuality and has no control? That is weak and given over to temptation? No – the kind that yields to God, and receives His fruit of self-control. Self-control is not self-generated – it is a fruit of the Spirit. **Galatians 5:22-23** lists it as one.

Proverbs 25:28 portrays the sad state of one who does not embrace purity: *“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”* When you don’t believe and embrace God’s

way by faith, you become like a defenceless city. A city without wall in ancient times was completely vulnerable to every kind of attack. So, we become prey to every temptation – any kind of provocation from the Internet or TV. Ask anyone in such a state – this is not pleasurable.

It is not a joy to be a slave to your body. It is terrible. The superior pleasure of purity is the strength of self-control. It is the happiness of contentment. People look at a contented, self-controlled Christian, and glorify the power working in them as great. **Psalm 84:11** is the promise we hold onto by faith if we are not yet married, or if something has happened in this area of our lives that prevents marital joy: *“For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”*

That’s the promise we hold onto by faith. It is a superior pleasure to the promise of the pornographic picture, the salacious TV show, the tempting situation. God is not withholding joys from me. He is not trying to lessen my joy on this earth. He is trying to preserve it – to prevent us from harming ourselves and destroying our own joy. He does not want us enslaved to sexual sin – He wants us free in the strength of the self-control He provides. He wants us resting in the godly contentment He gives.

It is hardly necessary to list the negative promises of sexual sin. Proverbs is filled with caution of what sexual sin will bring – a wound, shame, regret, and finally death. Paul and Christ also warn with these severe words:

...whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

Hebrews 13:5

...fleshly lusts... war against the soul.

1 Peter 2:11

Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind... shall inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Matthew 5:27-29

The negative promises are terrifying and enough to warn a wise person off. But **it is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance** – it is the promise of a superior joy that will kindle my faith to follow God’s way. And this we have seen from the Word of God. Purity is a superior pleasure because it provides undivided joy in marriage. It provides intimacy with God, which sexual sin destroys. And it gives the joy of a God-glorifying body, rippling with self-control and contentment – which God provides.

Why drink from the polluted and poisonous puddles of sin, when God’s clean and pure brook of holiness awaits? Why go looking for the mouldy, rotten food of sexual sin, when the Living Bread awaits? All it takes is faith. Believe the superior promises of God and embrace them in obedience, by turning away from the promise of sin. Give God the glory, and give yourself the benefit, by embracing the superior pleasure of purity.

