

VILLAGE CHURCH OF BARRINGTON ELDER POLICY ON PURITY

As we move toward a post Christian culture in the United States, the Village Church Elders have felt the need to clarify our stance as followers of Jesus Christ in the matter of purity. Our cultural mantra is that there is no absolute truth. Our church and denomination holds that “The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men and the Divine and final authority for Christian faith and life.” We therefore will allow Scripture to be our “absolute truth” and define our position. What we find is that the Bible clearly teaches that God blessed humans with sexuality from the beginning and saw that it was good. From the early pages of Genesis (Gen. 2:24) the standard that God gave man for the expression of sexuality was the union of one man and one woman for life, with the intended outcome of the two becoming one flesh. This unity reflects the unity of the Trinity. This gift was affirmed by Christ in the gospels (Mat. 19:5, Mark 10:8) and by the Apostles in the epistles (I Corin. 6:16, Eph 5:31). The only other option given is celibacy (disciplined abstinence in singleness for those so called by God =>Mat. 19:12, I Corin. 7). The practices that fall outside these parameters are considered outside God’s intended purpose for man, and functionally lead to sin, with the glorification of the self, disease and death, and with a spiritual state of being separated from God (Romans 1:18-32, and chapters 3&6).

The lifestyle that we are called to as followers of Christ can be best summed up in the verse from I Thessalonians 4:3, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.” The Greek word for sanctify is “hagiasmos” which also can be translated “holiness”. It is often thought of in a negative sense of being “separate from” our culture but it is more importantly a process of becoming more like God’s character. It is an intentional Spirit led conformity to God’s character. This is based on Leviticus 11:44, “for I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.” This is a call to become like Christ. It is interesting to note that the Person of the Godhead that enables this transformation is called the “Holy Spirit”, thus not only indicating His character but also His role to make men holy like God.

The rest of Paul’s text in Thessalonians is very applicable to a discussion on purity, as he continues to explain one aspect of becoming ‘holy’, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God, and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit.” Sexual behavior is to be holy, that is, congruent with our relationship with God. It is also to be honorable to our spouse. Its absence outside of marriage is honoring the future spouse and God, as well as the Body of Christ. Paul reminds us that sexual behavior has both spiritual as well as physical and social consequences.

It has become a practice in our current culture for many to become confused or deceitful on what exactly is sex and what actions would be considered sinful. The Bible is not confusing but clearly teaches and defines inappropriate sexual behavior. A general Greek word that is used is “porneia” from which we get our word for pornography. It is a general term for nearly any type of sexual sin including prostitution, adultery or fornication. In order of appearance in the Bible, the following sexual sins are condemned: adultery (Exodus 20:14, Lev 20:10, Dt. 5:18, Mt 5:27 and many other passages), incest (Leviticus 18:6-18, 20:11-22), homosexual intercourse (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, I Corinthians 6:9), bestiality (Leviticus 20:15-16), rape (Deuteronomy 22:23-29), lust (Matthew 5:28), and fornication (I Corinthians 6:9 and Acts 15). For Paul it was irrelevant what type of sexual immorality was being practiced, as it all would lead to not inheriting the kingdom of God. (I Corinthians 6:9-10). It should be obvious that if intercourse outside of marriage is considered inappropriate, then also sexual activity that leads to intercourse is also outside the realm of appropriate conduct. Giving away what can only belong to a future or current spouse is part of the sin problem.

VILLAGE CHURCH OF BARRINGTON ELDER POLICY ON PURITY

Unlike many today who would teach that sexual activity is an inconsequential private activity involving one or more consenting adults, the Apostle Paul teaches in I Corinthians 6:12-20 that inappropriate sexual activity has an impact on one's relationship to God as well as other people. Our bodies belong to God and He places His Holy Spirit in the bodies of believers. Paul clearly states that our bodies are not our own, they were bought with the priceless blood of Christ. We are therefore to honor God with our bodies. For Christians, proper expressions of sexuality will promote community by binding a man and woman in a way that nothing else can. It is a symbol for the community found in the Godhead, and its misuse is a symbol for idolatry against God. It is the goal of the leadership of Village Church to help all believers toward the goal of full maturity in Christ. This will be manifested in loving Christ by obeying Him (I John 5:2-3) and producing fruit spiritually and for the kingdom (John 15:1-17). It is expressed in Scripture such as Galatians 5, Ephesians 6:10-20 and Philipians 2:1-18.

It is also apparent that God is concerned not only with our actions but also with our thoughts. The correlation is that our thoughts will eventually lead to words and deed. Christ warned us against sinning in our minds sexually, and morally equated it with actual actions (Mt 5:27-28). We are told by the Apostle Paul to take every thought captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). This would manifest itself practically by fleeing temptation (I Corinthians 6:18) and avoiding tempting situations, practicing the spiritual disciplines, filling your mind with the scriptures, and concentrating on noble and Godly activities (Phil 4:8). Knowing that we all still struggle with the flesh, we must confess our failures quickly to God (I John 1:9), and hold each other accountable in loving Christian fellowship (James 5:16). Seek out help from spiritually mature Christians so that no stronghold is established in your life (2 Corinthians 10:4).

It is the duty of the congregation to reach out to those who are lost and don't know Christ with His love and the good news of the full Gospel. (Matthew 9:10-13, Matthew 28:18-20). The gospel message is clear that we have all fallen short of God's glory and are in need of a Savior and Redeemer found only in Jesus Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 3). Those who have developed addictions will need accountability and support to rid themselves of patterns of living that lead away from God. Our effort will be towards restoration to God and His standard (Galatians 6:1). Those who willfully choose to ignore or disobey God's design for sexuality will be ineligible for membership or leadership. (See qualifications of leadership policy) This would also mean that those still struggling with lifestyles incongruent with God's standard, who are intentionally working toward leaving destructive patterns of behavior, would be able to serve in areas using the gifts of helps, mercy and service for adult ministry after approval by the elders. Members of the church who fall from God's standard should be approached with the progressive discipline outlined by Christ Jesus for His Church in Matthew 18:15-17, and demonstrated by Paul in I Corinthians 5 so that the body of Christ may be kept pure and blameless.

In summary we believe:

1. That God created humans in His image, intentionally male and female, with each sex bringing unique but complementary qualities to sexuality and relationships.
2. Sexuality is a blessed gift from God to be offered back to Him, either in marriage for procreation, union, and mutual delight, or in celibacy for undivided devotion and service to Christ.
3. Christians are called to proclaim the truth and beauty of God's design and the redemption of sexual brokenness in our lives and culture through Jesus Christ.
4. For those caught in the bondage of sinful patterns of living, we believe in the emancipating power of Jesus Christ. We hold as our goal the full restoration of those who have chosen sinful patterns

VILLAGE CHURCH OF BARRINGTON ELDER POLICY ON PURITY

of living and have become entrapped in their sin. This will be accomplished through the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power, the Living Word of God, and through the Church with loving Christian fellowship.

5. We believe that while restoration from sin is occurring, those who wish to serve in the church should do so in the adult ministries with the gifts of helps, mercy and acts of service after approval by the elders. Membership and leadership positions should not be considered during this period.