

The Beauty of Innocence, Modesty, and Purity (Human Sexuality)

Ephesians 5:3-16 on August 17, 2025

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Please read Ephesians 5:3-16 before going further in this transcript.

Today is week 4 of a 5-part sermon series on Human Sexuality.

July 27: A Way That Seems Right (Intro to Human Sexuality series)

August 3: The Beauty of Christian Singlehood

August 10: The Beauty of Christian Marriage

August 17: The Beauty of Innocence, Modesty, and Purity

August 24: A Compassionate, Truthful Response to LGBTQ+

> Today's bulletin has a list of Resources on Human Sexuality. Many of those resources are currently on sale in our Connection Café.

> Each of these sermons will be posted on the church website:

(www.efcbemidji.org/sermons/sermon-list)

> This series contains some "PG-13" themes, so we've provided some special options for our younger worshippers. (See page 2 of the bulletin.)

> We're also providing a "Fireside Chat" down in our Fireside Room at 11 a.m. for anyone who'd like to talk about the message.

In Matthew 10:16 Jesus tells His deeply devoted followers, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as *innocent* as doves." In Romans 16:19, the Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, "...I want you to be wise about what is good, and *innocent* about what is evil."¹ Innocence is such a beautiful thing...

One day when our daughter Serena was 7 years old, I took her out on a daddy/daughter date. We were sitting together at the old Dunn Brothers Coffee (*which is the Coffee District now*). We were talking together while she sipped on her hot cocoa, and I drank my coffee. She said to me, "Daddy, do you want to play Snorta?" (*You see, she had brought along some board games for us to play on our Together Time.*) Snorta is a game where each person makes barn animal noises...out loud. As in, let me hear your cow "moo" or your chicken "cluck" or your pig go "oink oink." Now, the idea of playing this game in a public coffee shop, just seemed a little embarrassing to me, so I asked her what other game she brought? Operation is a game where you use this little set of tweezers to operate on the guy lying on the table; the mostly *naked* guy. I must admit, I didn't really think this through when I told her to grab some board games for us to play.

¹ In the midst of a discussion about worshipping God with our Spiritual Gifts, 1 Corinthians 14:20 says, "Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults." Being innocent doesn't have to mean that you are immature, dumb, uncool, or naïve; in fact, it may actually mean that you are mature and smart, and wise beyond your years, which is actually incredibly cool.

“Operation” also seemed a little awkward for us to play in a public place. But for Serena, she was fine with either of these games. She was completely innocent. To her, these games weren’t embarrassing at all, and they were certainly nothing to feel awkward about.

The older I get, the more I’ve come to admire the beauty of innocence; even to envy it and to wish that I could gain some former semblance of it. It’s unfortunate that part of growing up usually means losing some, if not most, of our innocence. You see, it’s one thing to lose our innocence about making barnyard animal noises in the coffee shop, and it’s another thing to lose our innocence about sexual immorality and sin. Innocence is such a beautiful thing; once we lose it, it’s almost impossible to get it back.^{2 3} In Ephesians 5:3-16, our Creator is calling His creation back to a place of innocence. He’s calling us to live as *children* of Light.

Innocence, modesty, and purity...

1) ...are all such beautiful gifts. Let’s define each one of them.

Innocence: Free from corruption, unacquainted with sin and evil.⁴

(That was the beauty of going to the coffee shop with Serena that day.)

Ephesians 5:3 begins with a high standard for Christians, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity....” The more impurity that we’re exposed to and involved in, the less we’ll enjoy the beauty of innocence. Some of us have been exposed to a certain amount of impurity, out of necessity, due to our careers.

In order to help people who’ve been hurt or traumatized by impurity and sexual immorality, we’ve had to wade through it with them. *(I’m thinking of trauma care nurses, pastors, law enforcement officers, and the like.)* But that’s not what Ephesians is warning against. It’s warning against the times when we unnecessarily open ourselves up, to impure thoughts and actions. It’s warning us to be careful not to behave in sexually impure ways, or to spend time learning about sexually impure things, about which we have no need to know.

Another one of God’s beautiful gifts is modesty.

Modesty: Mindful courtesy for how one’s actions and attire may impact others.⁵

² But in Matthew 19:26, Jesus reassures His disciples that, with God, all things are possible.

³ There’s an old song by Stellar Kart titled, “Innocent.” Check it out here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhyR15xU-Qk&list=RDPhyR15xU-Qk&start_radio=1 Amy Grant sings “Innocence Lost.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjMZfJmbWI&list=RD_WjMZfJmbWI&start_radio=1

⁴ We often think of innocence as related to someone being “not guilty” of a crime, but for today’s sermon on Human Sexuality, we’re referring to it in terms of purity, a lack of corruption, being unacquainted with sin and evil.

⁵ Modesty can also refer to being an unassuming person, or to possessing things in limited amounts. In today’s context, however, we’re focusing on appearance and behavior that’s intended to avoid impropriety or indecency.

The clearest statement that we find in Scripture regarding modesty is found in 1 Timothy 2:9-10, “9 I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.”⁶ Now we don’t find any parallel verses in Scripture which directly address modesty for men, but certainly men who profess to worship God, should also dress with decency and propriety. In fact, modesty can be closely associated with chivalry; it’s a mindful courtesy for those around you, which applies to both women and men. So modesty refers to both ladylike and gentlemanlike behavior.

Not only is it commendable for men and women to act and dress in a way that’s considerate of others, but it’s also commendable not to gawk at the more sensual wardrobe choices that some people make, or to share them on our social media feed. We’re in the season of bikinis and speedos, of women in short shorts and guys with no shirts on. But as curious as we may be, and as tempting as it may be to look, it’s better to look away from tempting images and from the underdressed people around us.⁷

To be clear, we enjoy the beauty of modesty, not out of judgment, but out of reverence for Christ and the purity He wants for His people. And we also enjoy the beauty of modesty out of our love for one another. Caring for one another, should compel us to be considerate of one another’s weaknesses, and of the very real possibility of causing someone else to stumble.⁸

Another one of God’s beautiful gifts is purity.

Purity: Cleaned up and uncontaminated by sin and immorality in our heart, mind, body, and soul.⁹

Ephesians 5:3-4 says, “3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.”

⁶ The word for “modestly” in verse 9 is αἰδώς, “This term expresses the opposite of considering or treating something in a common or ordinary manner; a respect for convention. ① modesty of women ...② reverence, respect...” William Arndt et al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 24–26.

⁷ We don’t have to go check out the latest viral video that reveals all. In fact, for those of us who are deeply devoted followers of Jesus, we should be the first to avert our gaze and delete our access to things like these.

⁸ So not only does the beauty of modesty remind us to be courteous in what WE choose to wear, but it also reminds us to be mindful not to stumble into sin because of what OTHERS choose to wear. In Luke 17:1 “Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come.’”

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:7 says, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” In Matthew 5:8, Jesus declares, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” See also Psalm 24:3-4 and Hebrews 12:14.

Verse 3 lists 3 things which are *improper*.¹⁰

- sexual immorality: Sex outside of heterosexual marriage¹¹
- any kind of impurity: moral corruption or filthiness
- greed: insatiable desire for more and more (coveting)

Verse 4 lists 3 more things that are *out of place*:

- obscenity: Shameful, filthy, or indecent behavior
- foolish talk: Saying something careless, unhelpful, and often hurtful¹²
- coarse joking: Unwholesome, crude, or vulgar speech
(*Dirty jokes are tough to forget once you've heard them, and easy to repeat if we're not careful. It's pretty difficult to find a clean comedian these days, but there's no shortage of vulgar, dirty jokes going around.*)

To be sure, these verses are addressing more than just sexual impropriety, but sexually inappropriate thoughts and behaviors are right at the heart of what's being addressed here. Deeply devoted followers of Jesus need to be aware that these things are improper, and out of place, in the Christian life. We need to ask God for daily wisdom and daily self-control to embrace behaviors and attitudes that would be pleasing to Him, and when we stumble into one of these areas, we need to invite God's Spirit to continue His daily work of purifying and sanctifying us.¹³

Now, I'm not suggesting that Christ-followers should embrace prudishness or a "holier than thou" attitude, but our conversation and our conduct should distinguish us, from those who don't know and love Christ.¹⁴ Christ-followers have been called out of darkness; this is an essential part of our testimony and witness before the world. This is what purity is all about, it's what it means for salt not to lose its saltiness, by not being polluted with other contaminants. In order for our lives to shine forth the beauty and goodness of Christ, there needs to be evidence of the beauty of innocence, modesty, and purity. Friend, God has called us out of this garbage; Jesus died to rescue us from it, and to redeem and renew our lives from it. So, if any of this stuff is still hanging around in our lives, then it's time to do some

¹⁰ The following definitions are based on consulting both Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 769). New York: United Bible Societies and Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 34). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹¹ "The Greek term for *"sexual immorality"* [πορνεία] refers broadly to all kinds of sexual misconduct, including both premarital and extramarital sex, as well as homosexual activity. Paul forbids any sexual act that is done outside the bounds of heterosexual marriage." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2443 footnote on 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

¹² Consider Ephesians 4:29.

¹³ So with this list in front of us, it's a good idea to do some self-evaluation. Not evaluating others, but just ourselves. As you look at this list, are any of them a regular part of your life? If you were to ask for feedback from your friends or family, or from the people who know you from work or school, what would they say? Would they say: "no, he's not like that; no, her faith is pretty clear." Or, would they say something else? Would they say that you actually enjoy a dirty joke now and then? In fact, maybe you even tell one once in a while?

¹⁴ Consider Colossians 4:5-6.

late summer clean up! You may need to pile it up, and have yourself a good old bonfire, or grab a great big sledgehammer and smash some things to bits. You may need to chew on a bar of soap for a few weeks, and find a good accountability partner, to whom you can confess your sin, and with whom you can work through a particular area of your life. Soul cleanup, requires genuine actions of repentance, and strategic plans to pursue holiness out of reverence for God.¹⁵

Unfortunately...

Innocence, modesty, and purity...

2) ...are all too often mocked and devalued.

Ephesians 5:5-7 goes on, “5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. 7 Therefore do not be partners with them.”¹⁶ Losing our commitment to innocence, modesty, and purity moves us in the dangerous direction of idolatry; of placing our affection on lesser things. If we allow ourselves to be deceived by immorality, impurity, or greed, it puts us in line for wrath. Deceptive influences can lead us to disobedient actions, so Scripture warns us not to be partners with people who embrace and promote these sinful behaviors.¹⁷ Now, sometimes this deception might come from people who are motivated by their own selfishness and wickedness. But, at other times, this deception might come from people who simply lack a godly understanding of the value of innocence, modesty, and purity, because they haven’t been taught. They’re trapped in their own sinful and empty way of thinking, and they’re baffled why anyone would forsake the pleasures of sin?^{18 19}

Unfortunately, much of our media today mocks the beautiful innocence, modesty, and purity that God desires for us. I can still remember the mocking tone of a radio program I listened to a while back; they were talking about the statistics on STIs and teen pregnancy in the U.S. One of the speakers cracked a joke about the *supposed* “benefits” of teaching sexual abstinence in the public schools. The response from the guests on the show was instantaneous laughter. The commentary that followed was filled with assumptions that every teenager out there was having sex, with

¹⁵ Consider James 5:16 and Acts 19:18-20.

¹⁶ “Empty” in verse 6 is defined as “being devoid of intellectual, moral, or spiritual value” by Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 539). University of Chicago Press.

¹⁷ Consider Romans 1:32 and the preceding context. See 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 and 2 Corinthians 6:14.

¹⁸ These deceivers find Christ-followers strange. 1 Peter 4:4 explains it this way, “They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.”

¹⁹ In these verses, God is calling us to more than just sexual purity though. He’s calling us to purity of every kind: purity in our thoughts, motives, and actions. Purity from greed that leads us to pursue the lesser things of this world rather than the immensely better, and satisfying things of God.

their hormones running wild and out of control. Now I realize that many teens do choose to be sexually active, but to assume that none of them are choosing sexual purity and practicing self-control; well, that's just offensive! And we should be offended for them!

The fact is, there's a whole 'nother point of view regarding innocence, modesty, and purity; the view of the One who created and designed sex as a wonderfully good gift within marriage. People who are not yet following Christ need to understand that God has *never* said that sex is bad. God says sex is good; after all, it was His idea! He alone was the One who designed it to be pleasurable and fun. However, because He loves us, God warns us that sex, in the wrong context, is harmful and damaging to us. God's design is that the purity and pleasure of sex can be enjoyed within the context of a committed marriage relationship, between one man and one woman.

The fact is, there are many people who value sexual purity, who value virginity, and who value God's design for keeping sex within marriage. Everyone I've talked to, who has saved sex for marriage, is very glad that they did. I'm so thankful that my wife saved herself for me; and it was my honor, with God's help, to save myself for her. Choosing sexual purity is not only good and right because it honors God, but it's also a beautiful gift to ourselves, and to any potential future spouse. And to be clear, even if we've made some mistakes sexually, abstinence is still the best practice between now and when we get married. Whether we're still a virgin, or whether we've been sexually active in the past, we can honor God today by trusting Him and practicing sexual purity from this point forward. There are many powerful advantages to saving sex until marriage, not the least of which is honoring your future partner by waiting for them. Even now single people, you can be praying for your future spouse, and saving sex as something sacred and special to share one day in the future, with the person God is preparing for you.

Whatever our particular situation may be, each one of us needs to know that...

Innocence, modesty, and purity...

3) ...can be redeemed and renewed through Christ.

Ephesians 5:8-10 goes on, "8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light."²⁰ "9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord." Notice that verse 8 doesn't say that we once lived *in* darkness and now we live *in* the light. But rather, it says we *were* once darkness, and now, we *are* light. There's an important nuance here: when

²⁰ See Ephesians 2:1-10.

we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, and we're transformed by the Holy Spirit, our outside surroundings don't change but our inner person does – “the new creation has come.”²¹ Through the power of the gospel, once we're “in the Lord,” our essence has changed; we become “light, in the Lord.” Our union with Christ causes a radical transformation in us, from darkness, to light.²² This is why our way of living and thinking and loving is so radically different than the world around us, because we've been radically changed from within.

Philippians 2:15-16 talks about, “...[becoming] blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life....” What our world needs today is deeply devoted followers of Jesus who “Live as children of Light”; people who bear the fruit of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Our world, including the Bemidji area, needs Christ-followers who are living out their faith in ways that please the Lord.²³ Many people tend to look to things like better education, better health care, or better politics to make our world better, but none of these are nearly as important to our world, as better Christ-followers. Instead of being corrupted by the darkness that surrounds us, Christ-followers are called to embrace and model the beautiful virtues of innocence, modesty, and purity.

Ephesians 5:11-14 gives us this closing instruction, “11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. 14 This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”²⁴ This is talking about salvation, how the fruitless deeds of darkness are exposed by the light of the gospel. When Christ shines on us, we are transformed, and our innocence, modesty, and purity are redeemed and renewed. We've been exposed to the light of the gospel, and we've now become light. Therefore, verses 15-16 declare, “15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” Friends, God has provided a way for us to be redeemed from the darkness of sin, through faith in Jesus Christ. And He offers us daily renewal, through the sanctifying work of His Spirit. So let's pursue innocence, modesty, and purity, and let's enjoy their beauty once again!

²¹ See 2 Corinthians 5:17.

²² Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 367.

²³ See Ephesians 5:2

²⁴ Consider Ephesians 2:1, “...you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”