
Bought With a Price: What Biblical Sexual Purity Means—and What It Looks Like Today

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All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

We live in a world that talks about sex constantly and understands it almost never. It shows up in jokes, ads, music, group chats, dating apps, and half the arguments on the internet. At the same time, a lot of church people treat the subject like a live wire. We either go silent and hope the next generation figures it out from a youth group slogan, or we swing the other way and turn purity into a brand. Neither one is what the Bible is doing. The Bible is not embarrassed. It is not crude. And it is not trying to make you a nicer version of the culture with a Christian filter on top. It is trying to tell the truth about your body, your desires, your neighbor, and your God.

I want to talk about this the way you talk about it when the room gets honest. Not with a clipboard. Not with a scare tactic. Not with the kind of speech that leaves the guilty feeling hunted and the proud feeling safe. Biblical sexual purity is not a personality. It is not a dating strategy. It is not a way to keep your reputation clean so God will like you more. It is the fruit of belonging to Jesus with your whole self, including the parts of you that you would rather manage in private.

If that sentence already feels heavy, stay with me. The gospel is in this. If it feels easy, stay with me too. Ease is often just distance.

The first thing we have to get straight is what purity is not. It is not the absence of a past. It is not the absence of desire. It is not a white dress, a ring ceremony, or a streak of days without a fall. Those things can matter in their place, but they are not the thing itself. Some of the most sexually broken people I have known looked impressive in public. Some of the most faithful people I have known carry a history they would not put on a testimony stage. Purity in Scripture is about holiness. Holiness means set apart. It means your body and your desires are no longer up for auction. They have an Owner.

Paul puts it without softening the edges. “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). That is the center of the whole conversation. Not “don’t get caught.” Not “don’t ruin your future spouse.” Not even first “don’t hurt people,” though you will. First: you are not your own. Christ paid. The Spirit lives here. The body is not a rental car you can wring out and return. It is a purchased dwelling.

Once you hear that, a lot of modern slogans start sounding thin. “My body, my choice” sounds like freedom until you remember that a Christian’s body is already claimed. “Consent is the only ethic” sounds moral until you remember that two people can consent to something God calls sin and still wreck what He made. “As long as nobody gets hurt” sounds kind until you remember that God counts the hidden look, the secret feed, the quiet use of another image, and the slow training of the heart to treat people as fuel.

Sexual purity, biblically, is not less than avoiding certain acts. It is far more than that. It is the glad recognition that sex belongs inside a covenant God invented, between one man and one woman, for a lifetime, as a picture of something bigger than both of them. Everything else is a counterfeit of that gift, even when the counterfeit feels romantic, private, or “authentic.”

God is not anti-sex. That lie has done a lot of damage in churches and outside them. The first pages of Scripture are not shy. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Then He gives them to each other. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:24–25). Naked and not ashamed is not a pagan dream. It is the original design. Desire is not the villain. Distorted desire is. Shame enters after sin, not after the wedding.

Jesus Himself reaches back to that design when people try to make marriage disposable. “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What

therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4–6). Notice what He does. He does not treat sex as a private hobby with spiritual garnish. He treats it as creation order. Male and female. Leaving and holding fast. One flesh. God joining. That is not Victorian manners. That is Genesis still speaking.

So when the Bible talks about sexual immorality, it is not inventing a random list of taboos to keep religious people busy. The usual New Testament word is *porneia*. It is a wide word. It covers fornication, adultery, prostitution, incest, same-sex practice, and the whole field of sexual activity outside the one flesh covenant of marriage. It is not a word for “the kind of sex I personally find distasteful.” It is a word for sex torn out of the place God put it.

That is why Paul can say, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you” (1 Thessalonians 4:3–8). Read that slowly. Sexual purity is not a side hobby for intense Christians. It is God’s will. It is sanctification. It is honor. It is love for your brother or sister, because sexual sin is never a victimless private moment. It uses people. And if you shrug at this, Paul says you are not shrugging at a pastor’s preference. You are shrugging at God.

Hebrews is just as plain. “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous” (Hebrews 13:4). Honor marriage. Keep the bed holy. Remember judgment. That is not the tone of a culture that thinks sex is only chemistry plus consent. It is the tone of a holy God who made the gift and will not have it treated like cheap entertainment.

Jesus takes the command even deeper than the act. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27–28). That verse has been used like a club, and it has also been ignored like a museum piece. Both are wrong. Jesus is not saying a passing temptation is the same as an affair. He is saying the heart is the

real theater. Lustful intent is not noticing beauty. It is taking. It is rehearsing possession. It is using someone's body in your mind as if they exist for your appetite. Job understood the fight long before smartphones. "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1). The battle is often won or lost two inches behind the eyes.

If you only police behavior, you will become a skilled hypocrite. If you only talk about the heart and never change your habits, you will become a poet of compromise. The Bible will not let you split those. "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23). And then it also says, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18). Flee. Not negotiate. Not linger and see if you are strong enough this time. Joseph ran. David stayed on the roof. One of those stories ends with integrity in a prison. The other ends with a cover-up, a grave, and a sword that never leaves the house.

This is where a lot of us get tired, because we have been told purity is mostly for teenagers and single people. That is not true. The call does not clock out at the wedding. It also does not treat singleness like a hallway you pace until someone picks you. Both states have a holy shape.

If you are single, biblical purity is not "wait as a transaction so God owes you a spouse." That turns God into a vending machine and marriage into a prize for good behavior. Some faithful people marry. Some do not. Paul can say it is good to remain single and also say, "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). He is not sneering at desire. He is being a pastor. Desire is real. Marriage is a good provision. Singleness is also a real calling, not a holding pen. In either case the assignment is the same: your body is for the Lord.

What that looks like today for a single Christian is not mysterious, even if it is hard. It means you do not borrow marriage privileges without marriage vows. Sleeping together "because we love each other" is not a new exception God forgot to mention. Cohabiting because rent is high and the relationship is "basically marriage" is still playing house with holy things. The world will call that wisdom. Scripture calls it a lie about covenant. Love that will not make a vow is not taking the other person seriously. It is keeping an exit door. And sexual intimacy is not a test drive. One-flesh union is a covenant act. You do not get to treat it like a sample

tray.

It also means you take your thought life as seriously as your calendar. You do not get extra credit for remaining technically untouched if you are feeding on people through a screen. You do not get to baptize emotional affairs as “just talking.” You do not get to treat dating as a playground for your loneliness. Dating, if you do it, should be honest, chaste, and aimed at finding out whether you can walk toward covenant, not whether you can keep each other entertained until the feelings fade.

And it means community. “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). Along with those. Purity in isolation is usually just delay. You need brothers or sisters who can ask the real questions without a smirk. You need a church that talks about holiness without turning the wounded into a spectacle.

If you are married, purity is not “now we can do whatever.” The marriage bed is honored, and it is also bounded. The gift is for your spouse, not for your appetite in general. “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:3–5). That passage makes modern people twitch because it talks about authority over the body. Paul is not handing either spouse a license to demand or degrade. He is saying marriage is mutual belonging. Your body is no longer a private kingdom. Withholding as punishment, using sex as a tool, importing the habits of porn into the marriage bed, or keeping a secret inner life that your spouse is not part of—all of that defiles what God meant to be a place of honor.

Married purity looks like eyes that still have a covenant. It looks like a phone that does not have rooms your husband or wife would be grieved to enter. It looks like refusing the slow drip of “just friends” conversations that start feeding on intimacy you promised to one person. It looks like tenderness, not entitlement. “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). If your picture of marital sexuality

is taking, you have not been looking at Christ. He gives Himself up. He sanctifies. He cherishes. The mystery of marriage is not that it meets your needs. “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32). That is why adultery is not only a broken promise to a person. It is vandalism of a picture God painted of the gospel.

Then there is the phone. We would be lying if we talked about sexual purity today without talking about the device in your hand. Pornography is not a naughty habit sitting off to the side of real life. It is industrial-scale training in lust. It teaches you to consume bodies without covenant, without presence, without cost, and without love. It rewires patience. It cheapens the real person in front of you. It makes secret life normal. Jesus’ words about the eye were not waiting for high-speed internet to become relevant. They were already relevant. The technology just removed the friction.

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Put to death. That is violent language on purpose. You do not manage an idol. You kill it. Practically that may mean filters, accountability software, a dumb phone at night, getting the screen out of the bedroom, confessing to a mature believer, and refusing the lie that you are the one person who can handle a little bit. Those tools do not save you. They are just ways of tearing out the eye that keeps dragging you toward hell. Jesus was not being dramatic for effect. He was telling you that losing a convenience is better than losing a soul.

This is also why Paul cares about talk, not just touch. “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving” (Ephesians 5:3–4). Thanksgiving is the replacement, not prissiness. Crude joking treats holy things like trash. Thanksgiving treats the body as a gift. If your humor needs to undress people to get a laugh, your mouth is already catechizing your heart.

We also have to tell the truth about the stories our age tells. The culture says sex is identity. The Bible says you are made in the image of God, and your identity is either in Adam or in Christ. The culture says desire is destiny. The Bible says desire is real and also fallen, and it must be governed. The culture says restricting sex is harmful. The Bible says ungoverned sex

wages war against the soul. “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (1 Peter 2:11). That verse does not sound like a wellness tip. It sounds like combat.

So when the church is asked to bless sexual arrangements God has not blessed, the loving answer is not a sneer and it is not a surrender. Same-sex desire is not the unpardonable sin, and it is not a third way God newly revealed in the last fifty years. Practice is what Scripture forbids, along with every other form of porneia. A Christian who experiences that desire is not disqualified from belonging to Jesus. A Christian who insists that Jesus now approve what He already named as sin is not submitting to Him. The same is true for heterosexual sin, which is far more common and often treated as a milder disease. God is not impressed by the direction of your temptation. He is after the lordship of your life.

Transgression always has a human face. Someone’s daughter. Someone’s son. Someone’s future. Someone’s spouse. Yourself. Sexual sin is personal because sex is personal. That is why Paul can ask, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” (1 Corinthians 6:15). You cannot unscrew your body from your discipleship and take it downtown for the weekend. Union with Christ includes the body. The resurrection includes the body. “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Corinthians 6:13).

I need to speak to the person who is already thinking, I am too late for this conversation. You are not. If sexual sin could disqualify a person from mercy, David would be a warning without a psalm, the woman at the well would still be walking back to town with an empty jar, and the Corinthian church would have been boarded up. The Bible is full of sexually broken people who are then made new. Not papered over. New.

There is a difference between a hard heart and a wrecked one. A hard heart defends the sin, renames it, and calls the preacher unloving. A wrecked heart tells the truth. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Faithful and just. Not faithful and soft. Just, because Jesus already bore the thing you are confessing. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). That is not permission to stay. That is oxygen

to stand up.

Repentance is more than tears. It is a change of mind that becomes a change of direction. It looks like naming the sin the way God names it, not the way your excuses name it. It looks like ending the relationship that is not yours to have. It looks like telling the spouse the truth instead of managing the secret. It looks like throwing out the hidden archive. It looks like walking into the light before the light has to break the door. And it looks like receiving a clean standing you did not earn. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). David prayed that after the worst of himself was already on the table. You can too.

Do not confuse forgiveness with the absence of consequences. Some sins leave wreckage. Children, diseases, memories, distrust, a name you cannot unsay. Grace does not always rebuild the house the way it was. It does something better. It makes a future with God possible in the ruins. That is not small.

What does all of this look like on an ordinary Tuesday? It looks like a Christian who does not treat holiness like a mood. You wake up and your body is still a temple, whether you feel spiritual or not. You put your phone where your integrity can survive it. You tell the truth in conversation. You refuse to consume people. You honor your spouse in the way you speak about them when they are not in the room. You honor the single people around you by not treating marriage as the only adult life. You keep your eyes from wandering in the grocery line. You take a walk when the old path starts lighting up in your head. You memorize Scripture that is stronger than a mood. You sit under preaching that will not flatter you. You take the Lord’s Table as a person whose body belongs to the crucified and risen Christ, not as a tourist.

It looks like self-control that is not self-salvation. “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control. That means purity is not you clenching your jaw until heaven. It is you keeping in step with a Person. The Spirit does not only forgive. He trains. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11–12). Grace trains. If your version of grace never says no, it is not the grace of God. It is a

slogan.

It looks like presenting the body, not just the opinions. “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). Worship is not only what you sing. It is what you do with your eyes, your bed, your curiosity, and your loneliness. A living sacrifice stays on the altar when the feeling passes.

It looks like hope that is honest about weakness. “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Common. Not freakish. Not a special curse that makes you the exception. Common, and still escapable because God is faithful. The way of escape is often unimpressive. Leave the room. Call somebody. Open the Bible instead of the app. Go to bed. Confess before dawn. Those are not glamorous. They are how men and women actually stay free.

It looks like a church that can hold two things at once: a hard line and a soft heart. We do not move the boundary markers because the age is loud. “You may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:5–6). Empty words are having a moment. They always do. Love does not let a brother walk off a cliff and call the warning judgmental. At the same time, we do not turn strugglers into a cautionary tale we tell to feel clean. The church is a hospital that still believes in health. If there is no discipline, there is no love. If there is no mercy, there is no Christ.

Parents, this is not a talk you outsource to a video and a pizza night. Your children are being catechized by a world that will happily explain bodies without holiness. You have to speak earlier than you are comfortable speaking, and with more Scripture than slogans. Tell them God made the gift. Tell them the gift has a door called covenant. Tell them Jesus sees the heart. Tell them repentance is real. Tell them they are not their desires. And live in such a way that your private life would not make your teaching a joke.

Young men, the world will sell you the idea that manhood is appetite with a paycheck.

Scripture says manhood is self-control, honor, and the refusal to treat a woman as a product. Young women, the world will sell you the idea that your power is in being desired. Scripture says your worth was settled before a single person looked at you, and that holiness is not prudishness. It is freedom from being owned by the gaze of people who do not love you.

Older saints, do not retire from this fight as if desire had a birthday when it quits. Purity is a long obedience. Your counsel, your example, and your willingness to talk without smirking may be the difference for somebody who thinks they are the only one drowning.

I keep coming back to the same sentence because the Bible does. You were bought with a price. That means sexual purity is not first a project in self-improvement. It is loyalty. It is the body agreeing with the confession the mouth already made. If Jesus is Lord, He is Lord of the history you want to hide, the appetite you want to keep, the relationship you do not want to end, and the future you are scared will be lonely if you obey.

Loneliness is a real cost. I will not pretend otherwise. Obedience can leave a bed cold and a calendar empty. The Bible never says holiness will feel efficient. It says it is the will of God. It says the Lord is enough. It says the church is a family. If your only plan for purity is white-knuckling desire in a studio apartment with no brothers and no worship and no mission, you have stacked the fight against yourself. Get in the body. Serve. Sing. Sit at tables. Let older saints into your business. Fill your life with the kind of love that is not trying to undress you.

And fill your mind with what is true. “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8). Purity is not only starving the old diet. It is feeding a new one. Thanksgiving. Beauty that does not have to be stolen. Work. Prayer. The face of Christ.

The point was never to become impressive. The point was never to have a cleaner story than the person next to you. The point is to belong to Jesus in the place where this age is most evangelistic and most dishonest. Sex preaches. It will either preach the gospel—covenant, gift, faithfulness, fruitfulness, joy without shame—or it will preach the old lie that you are your own and your hunger is lord.

You are not your own. That can sound like a chain if you still think freedom means

unrestricted appetite. It sounds like home once you have learned what appetite does when it sits on the throne. The world promises expression and delivers compulsion. Christ commands holiness and gives a Spirit. That is not the same offer.

So here is what biblical sexual purity means for us today. It means your body is claimed. It means sex belongs in the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, and nowhere else. It means the heart counts. It means the screen counts. It means marriage is holy and singleness can be holy and neither one is a loophole. It means we tell the truth about sin without telling lies about grace. It means we flee, we confess, we walk by the Spirit, and we do it with the people of God instead of in a secret war no one is allowed to see. It means we hold the line because God drew it, and we hold the fallen because Christ bought them.

If you need a place to start before you finish this page, start here. Tell God the truth. Tell a trusted believer the truth. Remove the thing that keeps beating you. Open 1 Thessalonians 4 and read it as if God meant it for your actual life, because He did. Then get up tomorrow and present your body again. Living sacrifices have to crawl back on the altar more than once.

Father, we are not our own. You made our bodies. You bought them at the cross. You live in Your people by Your Spirit. Forgive us for the ways we have treated holy things as cheap. Forgive the hidden look, the defended sin, the relationship we had no right to, the hardness that renamed rebellion as authenticity. Cleanse us. Give us a covenant with our eyes and a tenderness toward the people we have treated as means. Teach the single to honor You without bargaining. Teach the married to honor one another as a picture of Christ and the church. Make our churches honest enough for repentance and strong enough for holiness. Train us by Your grace to say no to ungodliness and yes to a life that fits the price that was paid. Keep us from empty words. Keep us from despair. Make us faithful in secret. We ask this not because we have been clean, but because Jesus is, and we are His. In Jesus' name. Amen.