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Acts 15

Sexual Immorality

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“Father in Heaven, today’s topic is a heavy one. It’s a very important one though. And Lord, we need You to be the One who teaches us about it. We need You to give us the conviction, the understanding, the knowledge that You want us to have. We need You to give us the honesty that we should have and the victory that you are promising. And so we pray as we open Your Word, that You will be powerful in our midst today. That you will teach us, and that You will change our hearts. And we pray this in Jesus name, Amen.”

When I was in the 8th grade, I was the manager of the “JV” Football team. Now you may wonder, “Well, what is a manager?” A manager is a water boy or equipment manager if you will. And my job was to make sure that all the footballs and the teas, and things like this ended up on the practice field at the right time, in the right way, in the right place. I also had the storage of equipment afterwards. Putting the balls away, all that type of stuff, but also to hang the uniforms up so that they would be ready for the fellows when they came to practice the next time. Now here is how it worked. We had a team meeting and the team was there with the coach. He instructed them how the process was supposed to work. When they were done with practice, they were supposed to put their shoulder pads, their hip pads, pants, all that equipment, they were supposed to put them on a hanger.

Now it’s not a hanger like you have in your house. It was a wide hanger, steel, heavy, it was long and it had several rows on it. They were supposed to put their shoulder pads on the top, hang their helmet the certain way, loop their pants and their shirt over the other rails of it. And then, the coach instructed me that I was given a room. And it’s where these suits were to be hung up, right there. There were rows after rows of heavy bars. And I was to hang these up there. All of this was done in an alphabetical order. So that after practice, when somebody took off their uniform, their practice uniform, they would put it on a hanger properly, give it to me, and I would hang it up. So when we came to practice the next time, they could get it immediately. I knew where it was, and I would go get it for them.

Now the coach told me that the room was mine. No one was allowed in that room but me. He told me how he wanted it setup, he told me how he wanted it kept clean, he told me how it was supposed to operate and function. In fact, it was one of those rooms that had a door that was split. So you could have part of it opened. So he said, “You just open the top half, and don’t allow anybody in the room, otherwise it will be chaos” so I knew, that was the rule. He also said, “If they don’t put their stuff on the hanger correctly, do not receive it because if it’s not on there correctly, we can’t get all the stuff in there.” So the first practice, things went pretty well. These guys came in, they were done with practice. We were in August, and it was the two a days. So we’d finish the morning, afternoon was coming. And they wanted out of there. They were tired, they were sore, they were hungry, they wanted to go home, eat and go to bed, and then come back for their next practice.

Well, first practice, after the practice about the third guy that came with his uniform on the hanger, when he arrived, the equipment was not on a hanger properly. And so I refused to accept it. And he was upset, he wanted out of there. Behind him was a whole raw of guys who also wanted to leave. But I refused to accept it. The coach said, "Don't accept it if it's not right. It's your room; you are in charge of it. No one is allowed in there, it's got to be done right." So I said, "No." I am a little punk eight grader, and these are ninth and tenth graders, all of them football players, and all of them wanting to rip me to shreds. And this guy is hollering at me, and I refused to accept it. And then behind him, the guys are getting mad until there is almost the riot because they want out of there. They want to go home.

And there is this cacophony of noise, and I don't know what's going to happen to me, but I know I am not supposed to accept it, and I am not doing it. I am seeking to please the coach. About the time I thought I couldn't take it anymore, a door just a couple of feet away from where my door was opened. It was the coach's office, and it was the coach. He came walking out. He stood right next door to the door where I was, and he crossed his arms like this, and he never said a word. And that guy who had his uniform on the hanger wrong, turned around and went back to his locker, and adjusted it. And everybody else got real quiet. And they brought the equipment to me, and I put it away as it was supposed to be. And the coach never, ever said a word. And I learned something that day, it was this. If I would seek to please that coach, when needed, all the authority that he carried would be backing me up. And you know what? The same is true with God. If you seek to please Him, all the authority that He has will be there to back you up. And that's what I'd like to study with you today.

Please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 15. We are going to read verses 19 and 20. James is the one speaking, he says: "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood." Now I will not go through the background of Acts 15, I did that last week with you. If you were not here, that's a good sermon; I think you'll appreciate it, if you'd just get a copy on your way out. But at issue basically, the Gentiles are becoming believers, and there are Jews who are becoming believers, and the Jews want Gentiles to become Jews. There is a great stress. They want them to be circumcised. They want them to keep the Law of Moses, and after all the debate takes place, the bottom line is, James said: "In order for us to appreciate each other and have fellowship, when it comes to eating meat, do not eat meat that has been offered to idols, strangled, or has the blood in it, and we can all get along." And then he said, "And avoid sexual immorality."

Last week we dealt with the meat part of it, this week we are looking at sexual immorality. In the Greek, the word is "Porneo" and that's where we get the English word, pornography. Some of your Bibles use the word, fornication. Sexual immorality is translated as fornication. You may wonder, "Well what is sexual immorality according to the Scriptures?" Well, I am going to give you a working definition, and this is taken from Webster's dictionary, and it just so happens, it actually parallels the teachings of the Word of God. It is this: "Sexual intercourse other than

between a man and his wife.” It is, “Sexual intercourse other than between a man and his wife.” So a man and his computer or any other combinations you can be engaged, it’s immorality. You can be consenting adults, it’s immorality. And I am not going to go through all the combinations of what constitutes fornication. What does not constitute sexual immorality, is a man and his wife. Anything else is sexual immorality. What does God have to say about it? Let’s look.

Please turn to 1st Thessalonians chapter 4. We are going to read the first 8 verses of chapter 4, and then we’ll back up and deal with them verse by verse. In 1st Thessalonians 4 verse 1, Paul who is writing to the church in Thessalonica wrote this: “Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”

We begin with verse 1. “Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more...” That is simply saying, “There are good things going on in your lives. You have a faith, and you are building on that faith, and we are praying that you will abound more and more in that experience. He goes on to say, “...just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God.” They were instructed how to walk and to please God. It was taught to them how to do that. An illusion is given to that in verse 2: “For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.”

Now it doesn’t say the Ten Commandments specifically, but it does mention commandments through the Lord Jesus. Some have accused us as Seventh-day Adventists as being legalists because of the Ten Commandments. I dare say it has little to do with the Ten Commandments, and a whole lot more to do with our general attitude. In fact, according to the Scriptures, when somebody accepts Christ as their Savior and they fall in love with the Lord, they will seek to please Him. And we are told right here, one of the ways that you please God is to honor Him by obeying. And you obey His commandments.

Can it be legalism? Oh, absolutely. Let me describe it as a parent. If you have children, and you say to your children, “You must do your chores. I am going to be gone for some time; you must do your chores.” When you arrive home, if the chores are done, would you say, “Ah that was legalism?” Or would you as a parent say, “That was an act of love on my children’s part. They respected me, they honored me, they did what I asked them to do.” You wouldn’t say that was legalism? But I will tell you what legalism is. That is, if your children have said, “We want to do this, and we want to do that...” and you don’t want them to do this, you don’t want them to do

that. You've told them you don't have the money, you don't have the time, or it's not something that you think it's proper for the family. Whatever it is, but they want to do it, and they keep working you. They keep working you. And you leave, and you come home and the house is clean, and they've done all these things, and they are there with an expected look on their face saying "Now say no!"

You see, that is manipulation. And at its core, that is works. Works is seeking to get something from God because of what we do. Folks, you can never put God in a deader position to you. He doesn't owe us anything. And we can never get Him in that situation. But obedience to God is a part of the Gospel. It is a part of being saved by faith in Christ. He saved me, now what do I do? Well I do the things that please Him, not to be saved, but because I am saved. So Paul is saying, "Walk in a way to please God." Verse 3: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification that you should abstain from sexual immorality..."

When he says "sanctification" there, now that's a fancy way of saying, "It's God's will that you would become holy." That's what sanctification means. You see, God is holy. His law is holy, His government is holy, the principles that He governs by, all of it it's holy. When Adam and Eve were made back then in the Garden of Eden, they were connected to God through holiness. There was no sin in their lives. God was holy, they were holy, and the plan of redemption is to bring us back from the depths of sin to the presence of God where His image is restored back to unto us, and we are a holy people. And it means that we like what He likes, and we dislike what He dislikes. We become like Him. It is His will that we would become holy, and that we abstain from sexual immorality.

Verse 4 goes on to say: "...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." Now scholars debate among themselves as to what that means, "Your own vessel?" There is a group that says well, "own vessel", that means your wife. So a man is to learn how to conduct himself in such a way that he treats his wife in holiness and in honor. And I want you to know, that is a Biblical principle that should be practiced. That should be the goal of every married man here or of every man that wants to get married some day. Position yourself spiritually to treat your wife in holiness and with honor.

There is another group though that says, "Well, wait the minute, vessel, that doesn't mean wife because Peter says she is a weaker vessel that means that man is a vessel as well." In fact, in the New International Version of the Bible, it even interprets it as "body." So it is saying that each of you should know how to poses his own body in holiness. Your body is your body, what happens to your body, what choices you make with your body is important to God. And we are to conduct them in the idea of holiness. "Not," verse 5 as it says, "...not in passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God." There are people who let their body control them. Whatever their body wants, if it feels good, they will do it when they can if they can get away with it, whatever. They are, according to the Scriptures, people who do not know God.

People who know God are seeking to not be that way. Now I've got to say something here. Some of you are in church today, and you are struggling, really, really struggling with sexual immorality. It maybe with your computer, it may be with another person. I don't know. But I want you to know this. The doors of this church will always be open to any single person who is struggling. And I mean, trying to overcome it. But, if your attitude is such that this is just the way you are, and you are not going to deal with it, this church is not for you. It doesn't work that way.

Unfortunately, often times what happens is somebody will be blatantly unholy in their actions. Could be a man, could be a woman, but they go off with somebody else. I have seen it where they even come back to the church in an unholy relationship with somebody, and that, I will call them "the innocent party" is sitting there. They don't even want to come to their own church because there they are in the presence of somebody, who's blatantly, flauntingly living in immorality. And I believe brothers and sisters that evil ought not to take over, that this ought to be the place for the people who have been injured by that to come and be healed.

Now, let me make it crystal clear. If you are struggling to overcome, the doors are wide open to you. If you are not struggling to overcome, and somehow you think, grace gives you permission, the doors are closed. We don't want you. I'll give you another analogy. Hospital! We are all sick, right? You know that analogy. But if somebody comes with a contagious disease, and they don't want to get well, they are not welcome in our hospital. Do you understand what I am saying? But if you want to get well, come! There is victory for you in Christ, and we want to share that with you, every single week. You will see in a few moments that I am not speaking my own opinions. I am reflecting God's attitude.

Well let's go on. It says in verse 6 that "...no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter because the Lord is the avenger." Now many times, a person will not see for sometime God avenging them, but it will happen. Trust me! You do not want to fall into hands of an angry God. And just because God's judgments are postponed or delayed or in mercy, He waits, don't think they won't come. The context of this passage is sexual immorality. If you are involved in it, and thinking you can get away with it, watch out. God will avenge, especially if your activities have broken up a home. Vengeance from God, judgment from God will happen. And it will be from Him. And no one will be able to deny it came from Him.

It says in verse 7, "For God did not call us to uncleanness but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man but God who has also given us His Holy Spirit." The message I have for you today is not from me. I wouldn't preach this for a million dollars. Yes I would, excuse me. I sure would. I don't want to preach this message. But I have to preach this message. It's the Word of God and it's from Him. And if you get uncomfortable today because this is cutting into your life, talk to God about it. Pray about it. Let Christ give you victory.

Turn to 1st Corinthians please. 1st Corinthians chapter 5, we are going to look at verse 9, just to help you to see God's attitude towards sexual immorality. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth and we are picking up the story in verse 9, he says: "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people." And that's a good counsel. "Yet..." he says, "...I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world." He is saying, "Yeah, I said stay away from sexually immoral people, idolaters and extortioners and all the covetous people, I said that. But I am not talking about the world; you wouldn't have the place to go."

But what is he talking about? Look what he says in verse 11: "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother; who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortion—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges, therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person.'" That's the church! Somebody in church who is flaunting immorality, the church is to avoid them. Not even dine with them. He is talking about church discipline. And if you read earlier in the story, you'll discover what's got him ticked off is that there was a man who was involved with his father's wife. And that's not what's got him mad. What got him mad is that the church is doing nothing about it.

Why is it so hard for us? Because the church is made up of our family and friends, and when somebody gets involved in sexual immorality, we know them. And we are understanding, and we get confused, and we don't know what to do. God says, don't even eat with them. Have no association with them. This is somebody who claims to be a brother, not somebody out there in the world.

Have you ever been in a church where they brought somebody's name in business session to the church for church discipline? My, you talk about things getting ugly. People get irrational and angry and so put out. I had a church, won't tell you where. But we had a situation blatant, blatant immorality. Board recommended they be disciplined, disfellowshipped. They came to the church in business session. Oh, they was such a rowel that was created by the friends that the conference, this is not exaggerating, told me that I should wear a bullet proof vest at the business meeting. I didn't. I was so miserable, my attitude was, "Go ahead, shoot me."

God has a definite opinion about sexual immorality. He hates it. And He wants us to hate it too. Look at 1st Corinthians 6, another passage dealing with God's attitude towards sexual immorality. Verse 13, Paul is writing, he said: "Foods for the stomach and stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body." He is saying, "You know food is one thing, sexual immorality is another." How many of you have ever heard, "Well all sin is sin in the eyes of God." That is not Biblical. There is sin that is worse than other sin in the eyes of God and sexual immorality is one

of those that is really heinous to Him. He is going to, through Paul, He is going to describe, there is a difference in God's eyes about sin, or sexual immorality than other sins. Verse 14, he had referred to sexual immorality and the body, in verse 14: "And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that our bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For 'the two,' He says, 'shall become one flesh.' But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him."

You get involved in sexual immorality and you transfer allegiance. Your body is connected to it. That's what Paul is saying. Your body is either connected to Christ, or to the harlot that you are with. It goes on, he says, "Flee sexual immorality..." verse 18, "...Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." Is different, he is saying. Later Paul says, "It's like grabbing fire. You can't grab fire with the hand and not expect it to consume the whole body." Now we like to quote the next two verses in the context of healthful living. But in the Scriptures is in the context of sexual immorality.

Look at verse 19: "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at the price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." God hates sexual immorality. It destroys individuals, it destroys families, it destroys communities, and it is destroying the culture of the United States of America. God hates sexual immorality!

What can we do about it? Well, I'd like for you to turn back to 1st Thessalonians chapter 4. In verse 1 we read: "Finally then brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus, that you should abound more and more. Just as you receive from us how you ought to walk and to please God." That idea, "a walk to please God" is the key to give us victory over sexual immorality. Let's look at it at the life of Jesus. Please turn to John chapter 8 verse 29. Jesus will be the speaker. He says, "And He who sent me is with me. The Father has not left me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." Jesus is saying, "I am not alone, the Father is with me, He is always with me. Why is He always with me? Because I always seek to do that which pleases Him and so He is with me."

And it even gets more descriptive in John 14. Again, Jesus will be speaking. John 14 verse 10. This conversation takes place at the last supper. Jesus will die the next day on Calvary for us. He is speaking in verse 10, He says: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak of my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does the works." Jesus in His humanity walked on the earth. Yes He was Divine, but He was human, and we can all appreciate His Divinity. What troubles us is His humanity. How did He do it? How did He live without sin? He always sought to please His Father, He said, and it is His Father who does the works through Him. The Father, giving authority to Christ in His humanity, and doing the works through Him, and that's good news for us because the same thing is true for us. In fact, when we accept Jesus as our Savior, notice what happens. Same

chapter, verse 23, you accept Jesus as your Savior you are going to begin to love Him. It says, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word and My Father will love him. And We will come to him and make Our home with him." You accept Christ into your heart; it's the same as accepting him into your mind. He comes into your mind, He begins to clean up. He says, "Here is how I want it look. Here is how it's supposed to function. Here is what you allow in this area; here is what you don't allow into this area. You hold the key." And He is saying His authority will stand next to us like the coach in my early story with his arms folded. And I'll tell you the authority of God is such that every evil thought and every evil temptation bows to it. It cannot come in unless you let it.

Now note: you cannot control your initial thoughts. Have you ever been sitting there and you say, "Wow where did that come from? Wow, wow, what is going on with that?" You can't control that. What you can control is what you allow it to stay there and take root. What you allow to stay there and fantasize and work with, and massage and run it down paths. That we have control over, and that is where the victory is. No sexual immorality ever takes place without entering the mind first, then it's carried out in the body.

And here is the promise: Jesus is saying, "Look, you let me into your heart, and we'll clean that area up." And it will be the area of holiness, so holy in fact that Jesus and the Father will be there. And you know that the Holy Spirit will be there too. Now that is a lot of holiness and that is a lot of power. And Jesus says, as long as you remain the door keeper, as long as you say "no" to things that shouldn't be in there, He says: "My authority, My Father's authority, and the Holy Spirit's authority will keep it out." But if you want it in there, you can have it in there, but you will not become holy. And you will be denying God and you will ultimately loose big time.

Today, I have a question. Is there anyone here who would like to say to God, "God I want my mind cleaned up by You, I want it ordered and structured by You. And by Your grace, I want to become the gate keeper of what is allowed to stay there. And by Your grace Lord, through Your power, I am asking You to push it out when I say it's got to go." If there is anyone here who would like to say that to God, I want you to stand right where you are at.

"Father in Heaven, today we thank You for victory in Jesus. Lord, we pray to live our lives in such a way that it is pleasing to You. And we are asking for You to come and dwell within us and for You to do the work. We are placing our will, our choice on Your side now Lord, and we are praying for victory, victory that is deep, clean powerful and miraculous. And Lord, we ask to be a holy people. And we pray this in Jesus name, Amen."