

Staying Pure in a Wicked Society



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God's Word tells us it's possible to remain pure in the midst of an evil society. And the Lord gives his anointing only to those servants who remain pure before him. We see this illustrated in the life of Daniel, who lived in one of the most wicked, immoral societies in all of history.

Babylon was a ruling power in Daniel's day, a city-state that represented everything ungodly in the world. The Babylonians were notorious for their sensuality and uncleanness, and they had taken Israel captive at the time. While in captivity, Israel got caught up in that society's wickedness. Israelite men were seduced into Baal houses of prostitution. Sodomites attracted others into sexual sin. Even priests who once feared God were overwhelmed by sensuality, becoming a tainted leadership over God's people.

All around him, Daniel saw God's people falling into pits of filth and degradation. Yet, in the midst of such depravity, Daniel determined to draw closer to the Lord. As the days passed and wickedness increased, this man grew even more godly and brokenhearted over Israel's sin. How did Daniel maintain a truly holy walk in such wicked times? I believe if we can discover Daniel's path to holiness, we'll find the key that will help us follow the same path today.

A holy fear of God put Daniel's face to the ground.

Daniel testified, "Behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words" (Daniel 10:10-12).

Proverbs gives us this powerful verse on the matter: "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil" (Proverbs 16:6). Note the first part of this verse: mercy and truth work together to purge our iniquity. Yet today, the church places such a heavy emphasis on mercy that we often discount the other vital element in the purging process: truth. What is this truth? It's the fact that God is wrathful toward sin. If his people are to rid themselves of habitual sin, then we have to walk in the truth about his attitude toward sin.

On the one hand, God's mercy works to keep us from falling into despair, reminding us we have a loving heavenly Father who's always ready to forgive our sins. At the same time, the truth of God's holiness works to produce in us a godly fear. An overemphasis on either one of these elements, mercy or truth, leads to a warped walk with Jesus. Mercy without truth leads to licentiousness and eventually spiritual death. Likewise, truth without mercy leads to despair and ultimately to death.

The fear of God isn't just an Old Testament concept.

While the Old Testament tells us, "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:7), the New Testament also speaks of such fear: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

The Bible makes clear that there is a fear of God every believer is to cultivate. That true fear includes an awe and respect, yet it goes much further. Godly fear gives us enabling power to maintain victory in wicked times. Jeremiah prophesies regarding God's covenant promise: "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me" (Jeremiah 32:39-40).

Here is a wonderful covenant promise from God, assuring us he'll provide us with his holy fear. Yet the Lord doesn't just drop this fear into our hearts by a supernatural manifestation—he plants it in us through his Word. Yet it comes from more than just reading the Scriptures. We obtain a godly fear when we consciously decide we will obey everything we read in his Word. We read of one knowing prophet, "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it" (Ezra 7:10, my emphasis).

Paul writes, "Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents" (1 Corinthians 10:9). This verse is important for all Christians who face temptation. Paul is referring to Israelites who fornicated with Moabite women.

One Israelite who tempted God grievously this way was a man named Zimri. As the remnant in Israel wept and repented over the nation's sin, Zimri was seeing a Midianite prostitute. In fact, he was so brazen about it, he paraded the woman through the camp in full view of everyone, including Moses, taking her into his tent to fornicate with her. God acted quickly on the matter. Scripture tells us an upright man named Phinehas followed the couple into the tent and slew both Zimri and the Midianite woman.

You may wonder what Paul means exactly when he speaks of "tempting Christ." Simply put, tempting the Lord means putting him to a test. We tempt him whenever we ask, "How long can I indulge my lusts before God's anger is stirred? We live in an era of grace with no condemnation toward sinners. How could he judge me, his child?"

Multitudes of Christians casually ask the same questions today as they toy with a wicked temptation. But they're tempting Christ, all the while they're casting God's convicting Word out of their minds. Anytime we go against truth that God's Spirit has made clear to us, we cast off Paul's warning: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.... Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand" (1 Corinthians 10:12, 8).

Ask yourself: are you testing the limits of God's precious gift of grace? Are you tempting Christ to indulge your sin in the face of your outright rebellion? Have you convinced yourself, "I'm a New Covenant believer, covered under Jesus' blood. Therefore, God won't judge me"?

Beware! By continuing in your sin, you're crucifying Christ afresh, as Hebrews warns against (see Hebrews 6:6). How? When you treat Jesus' great sacrifice with utter disregard, you willfully put him to an open shame, not just in the world's eyes, but before all of heaven and hell (see 6:6). Paul gives us this exhortation and warning: "These things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Corinthians 10:6).

Next, Paul describes a way of avoiding temptation, an escape route that God has made available to all his children: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (10:13). What is this means of escape? It is a growing knowledge and experience of the holy fear of God.

Why is this message about godly fear so important to the church today?

The Bible tells us in no uncertain terms, "Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Here is the truth, plain and simple: without the holiness imparted by Christ by faith alone—a precious gift we honor by leading a life devoted to obeying his every Word—none of us will see the Lord. This refers not just to heaven but to our present life as well. Without holiness, we won't see God's presence in our daily walk, our family, our relationships, our witness, our ministry.

It won't matter how many Christian conferences we attend, how many recorded sermons we listen to, how many Bible studies we're involved in. If we refuse to believe God for deliverance from a cancerous sin—if the Lord has a

controversy with us over our iniquity— then none of our efforts will produce godly fruit. On the contrary, our sin will only grow more contagious, infecting everyone around us. Of course, this issue goes beyond all lusts of the flesh, to the corruption of the spirit as well. Paul describes the same destructive sin in this passage when he says, “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1 Corinthians 10:10).

So, dear saint, will you allow the Holy Spirit to deal with any lusts you may be harboring? Will you instead seek and trust in the escape that God has provided for you? I urge you: Cultivate a holy fear of the Lord in these last days. It will keep you broken in spirit, no matter how loudly the wickedness rages around you. And it will enable you to walk in God’s holiness, which holds the promise of his enduring presence.

It is all a matter of faith. Christ has promised to keep you from falling and to give you sin-resisting power—if you’ll believe what he has said. Believe him for this godly fear. Pray for it and welcome it, knowing God will keep his Word to you. You can’t break free from the death-grip of besetting sin by willpower, by promises or by any human effort. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6). Amen!

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