

OpenTheo

Purity (Part 2)



Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture - Steve Gregg

In "Purity (Part 2)," Steve Gregg discusses how the dominant culture of Western civilization is focused on sensuality, but purity is necessary for true pleasure and fellowship with God. He emphasizes that God is not against all pleasure, but indulging in pleasure that is wrong can lead to the forfeiture of the ultimate pleasure of having a clear conscience and ready access to God. Gregg also highlights the importance of purity in sexual relationships and warns against sexual promiscuity, which can have devastating consequences like abortion.

Transcript

The culture of purity confronts the culture of sensuality. The dominant culture of Western civilization has certainly become a culture of sensuality, and I'm sure it is not restricted to Western civilization. I remember once being in a public library and seeing a book of a man who was a priest.

I believe it was Japanese art, ancient Japanese art, and it was paintings and so forth. I thought, well, I'm not very acquainted with ancient Japanese art. I leafed through it for a little bit until I noticed that it seemed like about a third of the paintings were sexually explicit and very sensuous and very immoral.

I guess it came as a surprise to me. I always thought those polite people over in Asia didn't have the same vices that we had over here. And I suppose that all cultures are in some measure subject to the sensuality that is part of the fallen nature of man.

Now, I didn't say our senses are part of the fallen nature. Our senses, the pleasures that we're capable of having in our physical bodies, those things are created by God. And God is the author of pleasure.

We need to realize that. Sometimes people think that the devil is the author of pleasure because so many things that seem like they are pleasurable are off limits to us. Even overeating, a great deal of sexual activity that the world engages in and so forth, we can't do those things.

They are forbidden to us. Getting drunk, using recreational drugs and things like that are things that Christians just, it's not open to us to do. And those are the things that the world calls pleasurable.

In fact, when they find that somebody has been converted to Christianity and doesn't do those things anymore, the first thing they wonder is, well, what in the world do you do for fun? Because it is thought that only illicit pleasures are truly pleasures. And there is some measure of truth in that, but only a very small amount. In the book of Proverbs, we're told that the prostitute calls out to her potential customers.

And she says to them, stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. And that's in measure true. That certainly is true to our fallen nature.

Not only the natural pleasurableness of certain acts, but also there's something in our twisted, bent, fallen nature that takes a certain extra degree of pleasure in thinking we're getting away with something that is naughty. Now you might say, well, Steve, speak for yourself. I don't feel that way.

Well, it is possible you're more sanctified than I am. And I must confess that as a Christian, I don't enjoy feeling like I'm getting away with something naughty at all. As a matter of fact, if I ever do anything that I perceive to be forbidden, I feel conviction against it.

And I personally think that being born again spoils you for sin in that the things that were once pleasurable, though they might have a measure of pleasure still enough to attract us and to tempt us to them, we cannot indulge in them with the same pleasure as an unbeliever can. And if you ever try it, you'll find that out. I don't recommend that you experiment with this.

But there are sinful pleasures, which after you are a Christian, if you are foolish enough to indulge in them, I believe that you probably will not find them as pleasurable as you did when you were an unbeliever because you have a different factor in you than was there before. It is a factor of the nature of God. It is the Holy Spirit.

It is the purity of God that resides in you. You are a person with two aspects to your nature. You've still got that physical, hormonal, biological man with its urges and cravings and so forth.

But you also have, as it says in 2 Peter chapter 1, you have been a partaker of the divine nature. And that divine nature is, among other things, purity. And if you seek to indulge in impure pleasures, you will find that there is a nagging in the conscience as you approach the act, as you conduct the act.

And the worst is yet to come after the act. And I'll tell you what, being truly saved does spoil you for sin. But to the unbeliever especially, there is this pleasure that is increased

by the feeling that they are doing something illicit and getting away with it.

And so the prostitute's words in Proverbs chapter 5 are not entirely untrue to the unbelieving person, to the unregenerate person. Stolen water is sweet, more sweet than legitimate water because there is that element of naughtiness that the fallen nature revels in. However, it is certainly wrong to suggest that pleasure is something that the devil holds a monopoly on.

As a matter of fact, whatever pleasure the devil offers, he does so grudgingly. God is the creator of pleasure. Everything that is physically pleasurable to us is made so by God's design.

God designed all of our nerves. God designed all of our hormones. God designed all of our taste buds.

God designed all the physical appetites that we have. They were present before the fall. They were made inherent in us.

We were biological, chemical beings, sexual beings and so forth before we fell. And when God made man and woman in this state, He said, And so whatever pleasures there are, even pleasures of the physical body are made by God. God made these pleasures.

The devil only gets mileage out of his program by co-opting these pleasures. And I believe that if the devil could get you to sin without offering you any pleasure, he'd gladly do so. He doesn't care for you to have any pleasure.

Pleasure is not really part of his agenda. Pleasure is simply the bait he uses to draw you into activities that are outside of God's rules, outside of God's laws. But when it comes to pleasure, God is the pleasure inventor.

He is the pleasure broker. It says in Psalm 16 that in His presence is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore. A person does not know pleasure until they know God.

They know something of pleasure. But they don't know the pleasure for which man was designed until they know the pure pleasure that comes from knowing and fellowshiping with God. I remember I've mentioned before that when I married the first time, I was a virgin.

I kept myself for marriage. And I had another friend in high school, a Christian friend, who did the same. And we got married around the same time.

I got married a little earlier, by maybe a couple of months. But, I mean, we both experienced sexuality or sexual outlet or whatever, sexual experience for the first time when we got married. And it was about the same time as each other.

And I remember asking him once privately, I said, well, Tim, what do you think? You know, now that you're married, you've had sex, what do you think about it? He says, you know, Steve, you hear so much about it from the world, you expect it to be really something. And he said, and it is. It's enjoyable, but he says, when I reflect on it, the thing that comes to my mind is that it doesn't hold a candle at all to the pleasure of knowing God.

And when he said that, that was exactly the echo of my own experience. Now, some of you, you know, I don't know, you might have different experience than that, but that was certainly mine. I thought, you know, okay, now that I'm married, I know what it is the world gets into so much.

And I think, this is it. This is all that they have. This is the ultimate thing that they will prostitute themselves for and compromise themselves for and endanger their health and their reputations and their relationship with God for this.

And I don't mean to give you the impression that it's not pleasurable or that I don't find it so. I'm saying that I had already known a greater pleasure than that before I was married. And I thought, once I was married, I thought, you know, the world kind of sold me a bill of goods about this.

It really isn't better than what I had before. Not that it wasn't good, because sexual pleasure is something God has made and that he called it good. When he made Adam and Eve, he made them sexual beings and he told them to use it.

He told them to be fruitful and to multiply and fill the earth. So, we know that God is not opposed to even that kind of pleasure. It's just, it's not as great a pleasure as that which is found at his right hand.

In his right hand are pleasures forevermore. That is something the world can't possibly know. And so, what the world seeks is to grab all the gusto it can of the earthbound kind of pleasures, because they know no other.

Christians can enjoy those pleasures too when they are practiced within the boundaries that God wishes them to be practiced within. But Christians have something more. And that is a pleasure of purity.

That is a pleasure that comes from a clean conscience. As we live an uncompromised life, as we do not indulge in those pleasures that we know to be wrong, because there is a greater pleasure that we would thus forfeit. If we would indulge in those pleasures that we know to be wrong, we forfeit the ultimate pleasure of having a clear conscience before God and having ready access before him.

It says in Psalm 24 in verses 3 and 4, it says, Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? And the answer is given, he who has clean hands and

a pure heart. The purity of heart that qualifies a person to come and stand in the presence of God is a pleasure that the unbeliever cannot know, nor can the compromised Christian know. But once you have known it, I think any thinking person would say, Would I wish to exchange this for that cheap thing that the world offers, that the devil offers me, which is a tawdry, inferior, temporal kind of pleasure.

Remember, the pleasures that come from being in God's presence are forevermore. In his right hand are pleasures forevermore. I have not known any earthly pleasure that was forever.

Even those pleasures that the world touts as the most, you know, the epitome of pleasure and satisfaction, those pleasures are fleeting, very fleeting. You see it, for example, in the story of Amnon and his sister Tamar. Tamar was his half-sister.

He was a wicked man and he lusted after his half-sister and he eventually raped her. But before he did so, it says that he was just enamored with her. She was a very beautiful woman.

He couldn't think of anything else but the conquest of this woman. He felt like that would be the epitome of pleasure to him. And maybe it was, I don't know.

He raped her, but as soon as it was over, he had no pleasure in it anymore. In fact, he was disgusted with himself, with her. He didn't want to ever see her face again.

It says he hated her with a hatred that was greater than the love with which he had previously loved her. What a strange, fickle thing is this sexual pleasure that the world worships and God calls us to something much more lasting, something much more satisfying. And that is related to purity.

But it is never known by those who are not committed to it. And the world is not committed to purity. The world is committed to pleasure, instantaneous pleasure.

Now, purity is not only something that's related to the sexual area. But, of course, it is the area where probably our culture has compromised itself most greatly and where Christians are in danger of following the world in this compromise. That is to say, there is hardly any category in our worldly culture that is more made impure and worshipped in its impure state than sexuality.

So much so that almost any form of sexuality is considered worth trying. And that's why our culture has gone from basically adultery and fornication to homosexuality and other things unworthy to be mentioned. That almost anything that brings sexual pleasure is considered to be worth trying.

And so much so that people assume that if people, for example, were born with homosexual tendencies, then no one should ever criticize them for practicing

homosexuality. As if the very fact that they have a craving for it is reason enough for them to indulge it. If that gives them pleasure, who are we to say they shouldn't do that? And, of course, Christians have made themselves look like the bad guys in standing against the whole movement toward normalizing and mainstreaming homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle because we're the ones saying it's not right.

And, of course, the word homophobe has been coined to speak of people who stand against the homosexual lifestyle. However, homophobe means something like fear of homosexuals. And it is really a misnomer.

It is really a disingenuous term because although I stand as strongly against the homosexual lifestyle as the Bible does itself, I hope, I don't have any fear of any homosexuals I've ever met. Well, one time I got picked up hitchhiking by a very large homosexual, twice my size. And he tried to persuade me to get involved with him, which I was very frightened at that moment.

But I wasn't so much afraid of his homosexuality. If I had been a female and he had been a male, putting the moves on me like that, I would have been equally afraid because he was bigger and, you know, it was more a fear of violence and rape and things like that rather than fear of homosexuality. It's not homosexuality that we fear.

It's simply this, that homosexuality, like many other forms of sexual activity, are not in compliance with that pure use of sex that God has created and that we stand by because God stands by. You see, the Bible that condemns homosexual activity also condemns heterosexual activity of all kinds, except within marriage. Therefore, it would be ridiculous to say that the Bible is homophobic just because it condemns homosexuality.

It condemns it for the same reason that it condemns adultery, or that it condemns bestiality, or that it condemns extramarital sex, none of which are homosexual. They all have one thing in common, though. They deviate from that sacred norm that God created called marital sex.

When God created sex, He made it to take place within the confines of marriage. Sex is likened in Scripture to fire. Paul said that people who could not restrain themselves sexually should marry because it's better to marry than to burn, he said, meaning, apparently, to burn with lust.

In Proverbs chapter 6, it's warning men not to commit adultery with their neighbor's wives. And it says, can a man take fire into his bosom and his clothing not be burned? Can a man walk upon hot coals and his feet not be burned? What it's saying is that sexual activity and sexual drive is like fire. And we know fire is a very good illustration because is fire good or bad? Anyone got an opinion? Is fire a good thing or a bad thing? Yes, right, it is good and bad, right? If it is in your fireplace, if it is under your control within the proper place that it belongs, it can provide heat, it can cause you to survive

when you would otherwise die, it can cook your food, it can disinfect things, fire can be very useful.

On the other hand, if somebody has ever had a house burned down, and I know there's at least one person here who has, they would say that fire is not always good. Fire is potentially and ideally very good. It's a wonderful gift that God has given to man that he apparently hasn't given to other animals.

Fire is a unique blessing to man, but it's not always a blessing. It's a blessing when it is within the confines where it belongs. It is not a blessing when it gets outside those confines, onto the carpet or into the drapes or into the walls or into the forest.

And we lost hundreds of thousands of acres of forest just last summer here in Iowa. Idaho and over in Montana and some other northwestern states burning out of control. Fire is very devastating.

Behold how great a matter a little fire kindlet, James says. Well, the Bible compares sexual desire with fire. And it's an apt illustration because within its proper place, it is one of the greatest blessings that God intended for man.

I can't think of anything more pleasurable when I'm out in the cold with the biting wind in my face and maybe icy rain hit me on the skin and I walk into my house and sit by the fireplace. It's sort of like you died and went to heaven. You know, fire can be very pleasurable.

And so can ordinary biblical sacred sexuality be very pleasurable. But once it gets outside of the boundaries that God has set for it, it is destructive. It's like taking coals into your clothing and hoping not to be burned.

And so the Christians' approach to sexuality, to purity in sexuality, is not to deny sexual pleasure. It is not to deny sexuality. It is, in fact, to affirm these things in their biblical way.

You see, it is in this area, probably more than most, that Christianity has something to address, something distinctive with which to address the dominant culture. When we talk about a radically Christian counterculture, certainly one way in which the culture of Christianity confronts the culture of the dominant society around us is in its thoughts about sex. Christianity is a culture of purity.

The culture around us is a culture of sensuality. And in particular, not just in the area of sex, but in the area of eating and drinking and, you know, recreational drugs, whatever. Just seeking to please the senses, that's the best the world knows to do, to seek this temporal kind of pleasure.

Well, this would be sad enough if the problem was confined only to the world outside the

church. But as we well know, it is not. We now have a serious problem of adultery, of premarital sex, and even of homosexuality within the defined realm of the church.

I say the defined realm of the church because I think of the church in its purest form as simply those who are disciples of Christ. And they don't commit fornication. They don't commit adultery because the Bible says that fornicators and adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 6, verses 9 and following. So, I mean, true Christians, those who inherit the kingdom of God, do not fornicate. They do not commit adultery.

And on occasions when some have maybe in a moment of weakness done so, they repent immediately and do not affirm it. They do not allow it to continue in their life. And so, we have something distinctive in our culture as Christians to address the world about.

But the world sees us principally as addressing this matter from a strictly negative view. We're against, you know, pornography. We're against explicit sex and violence in movies.

We're against the homosexual agenda. We're against premarital sex. We're against divorce.

We're against these things and therefore we're seen principally as people with a negative message. But our message is a positive message and that is that sex and the other pleasures that God has made possible for us to enjoy have an expression that is pure and without regret and without danger. That is a positive and wonderful message really when you think about it.

If we had a population of people who were just driven by sexual cravings, but there was no safe and legitimate outlet for these cravings, it would be a very sad situation indeed because these cravings do drive people. Many people find themselves incapable of resisting consistently and succumbing and so forth. And if the only way that sexual cravings could be alleviated would be by doing things that hurt the conscience and interfere with our relationship with God and cut off those pleasures that come from His right hand and also, you know, endanger our life as we know there's a great deal of physical and health risks involved in almost all sexual activity other than that of the Scripture.

If there was no safe and pure outlet for these drives, it would be bad news indeed. And the church has good news and has a positive message and that is that God is sympathetic toward our sexuality. He created it.

He authorized it. He sanctified it. He commanded it.

He's all for it. But He also regulates it. He also tells us how it should and how it should not be used.

And, you know, anytime you buy something, a machine, a lawnmower let's say. I bought many years ago I had a lawn tractor because we used to have a huge field for a lawn when we lived in Oregon. I mean acres of it.

And so we got a lawn tractor. And it came with all kinds of warnings, you know, don't do this with it. Don't go sideways on a hill.

Don't hold a child on your lap while you're driving. I violated all these rules, but, you know, don't put your feet under the cutting deck and so forth. I didn't do that.

But I mean the thing was intended to be, you know, a convenience. You know, it helps me mow the lawn without having to walk many miles every time I need to do it. But it had its dangers attached to.

Now, I didn't resent these instructions. I didn't resent these warnings because I truly believed that this was a powerful machine that could do some serious damage if it wasn't used the way it was manufactured to be used. The reason that our world resents the message of Christianity, especially when it comes to regulating sexual behavior, is partly because the world really does not believe that it's dangerous.

And how is it that they do not know? Their minds have been blinded, the Bible says. And that's all there is to it. God has blinded their minds.

It's because anyone with their eyes open can look around and see that AIDS has just, you know, decimated the population of Africa. And it has, you know, it's come over here and it's taken out a lot of our young people too. That's only one of many venereal diseases.

And people can see the damage that's been done to marriages and to the children of marriages because of adulterous affairs, because of unrestrained sexuality. What's been done to, well, I mean, abortion. The murder of untold millions of unborn children is very largely, not entirely, but to a very large degree, the result of sexual promiscuity.

It's much less often that a couple who are faithfully married want to abort a child. They sometimes, you'll hear cases of that, but certainly the vast majority of abortions are sought by people who have been promiscuous. So you've got innocent blood being shed on a regular basis by the, you know, millions of victims because of unrestrained sexual behavior.

I mean, anyone who has a modicum of intelligence could see this is destructive behavior. Maybe we should look and see whether God who made this sexual apparatus had any instructions and warnings, had any regulations and rules about this. And we shouldn't resent these rules if we find them.

We shouldn't resent them any more than we would resent rules telling us how to safely use a high-powered handgun that we may have purchased. We have to realize that that can be a positive tool or it can be a very destructive thing. So Christians have a distinctive message for the culture, and we do, and we must confront the culture.

Not so much with the don't do this and don't do that and homosexuality is bad and this is bad and this is bad and this is bad. Now we can say those things, but we have to be careful that we do not sound always to be the naysayers, the negative, you know, party poopers, because that's not what Christianity is. Christianity isn't here to rain on our parade.

Christianity is here to give occasion for a parade and to teach us how to enjoy it without any regrets the day after. And so our message is that there is a pure use of sex, and that is within the confines of monogamous, lifelong marriage. There are things related to the world's fascination with sex that don't involve actual intercourse.

At least they don't come to that. There are things that are related to the world's fascination with sex, but they're not quite so gross as going so far as, you know, actual illicit sexual activity. And because they don't go that far, many times Christians are willing to compromise with some of these things, because they can't really find a verse of scripture always, though often they're not looking hard enough.

But I mean, if they were tempted to commit adultery with their neighbor's wife, they might say, Now, I know the Bible says thou shalt not commit adultery, but there are other things related to sex that Christians sometimes do, because they can't think of a verse against it. I cannot tell you how many times I have been asked by Christians what the Bible might say about, and everyone cringes because they know what I'm going to mention. I don't know why we can't mention it from the pulpits.

I guess I won't. The right word for it, well, I guess we can just use a descriptive word. We should say self-gratification.

This is such a widespread practice. It's almost universal among non-Christians. And in my experience talking to Christians, it sounds to me like it's an extremely widespread practice among many who profess to be Christians as well.

And many times the problem they have is that they can't think of any verse against it. You know, the Bible is a sword against the devil. When the devil attempts you to do something, if you can do what Jesus said, it is written, thou shalt not do that, or thou shalt do that, you know, you've got some strength against it.

Many people, however, cannot find specific Bible verses against certain activities, which they wonder, well, then is this okay? Let me turn your attention to 1 Thessalonians, if I could, because this passage not only would probably address that particular issue that

I'm alluding to, but it's a general vision that it gives us for the sexual purity that God calls us to have in our mutual relations in the body of Christ. In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, beginning at verse 3, Paul says, For this is the will of God, your sanctification, now that's holiness, 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 has not called you thus to uncleanness, but to unholiness, therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us his Holy Spirit.

Now, if somebody came to Paul and said, Paul, I read 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4 recently, and I was still wondering, what do you think about the whole idea of sexual self-gratification? Do you think Paul would say, oh, I neglected to mention that, didn't I? Or would he say, are you sure you read 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4? Now, you see, Paul did not in this place, as he did in some other places, he did not enumerate different sexual sins that we're not supposed to do. There are places where he did, in Galatians 5 and 1 Corinthians 6 and places like that, you have a list of various sexual sins that Christians should avoid, but here he doesn't list any sexual sins. Instead, he provides a positive vision.

He says, you know, I want you to know what the will of God is for you. It's that you be holy. It's that you be sanctified.

His will for you is your sanctification. Now, one of the things that means is that you do abstain from, as he says, sexual immorality. Now, sexual immorality is a broad topic.

How do I know what things are sexually immoral and what things are not? Well, let me ask you, do you know what things are sexually moral? Let's start there. What activity that is sexual is for sure moral and is for sure sanctified? Because Paul doesn't list all the things that are wrong. He tells us positively, God's will is for you to be sanctified.

Okay, well, what do I know for sure is a sanctified use of sexuality? Well, we're told over in Hebrews chapter 13, verse 4, Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed, meaning the marriage bed, is undefiled. It's pure, undefiled. And so, I can say this for sure, that monogamous, faithful, lifelong marriage is a place in which normal sexual activity is sanctified.

It is pure. It is undefiled. That much I can say.

Now, what about everything else? Well, Paul doesn't enumerate everything else. He just says there's that which is sanctified, and there's that which is sexually immoral. And then he expands a little bit on what it means to not be sexually moral.

He says that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel. Now, this word vessel, he's not talking about a clay pot here, and it's not all that clear what he is referring to. I think I know, but many scholars have a different opinion than I do.

In fact, some translations reflect a different opinion to this. The word vessel can mean one's own body. Because Paul said in 2 Corinthians, we have this treasure in earthen vessels, meaning our physical bodies, our vessels of earth were made from the dust of the ground.

And so, we have this treasure in earthen vessels. So, a vessel could mean a body. But also, Peter says that the husband should give honor to his wife as the weaker vessel, so that the wife is considered a vessel.

And the rabbis did speak of wives as vessels. That was a metaphor for a wife. Which did Paul mean here? Now, I think the RSV and some other translations actually translate this instead of saying that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel, it translates that each of you should know how to take a wife in sanctification and honor.

I don't appreciate it when translators do that for me. I'd rather let them tell me what Paul said and let me figure out whether he meant wife or something else. I will say this, though I cannot be sure, I do not necessarily think that Paul meant that everyone had to take a wife.

We know from 1 Corinthians 7 that he thought it was a very good thing for people who didn't have to, if they could remain single and not take a wife. Although, in that same chapter he did say to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife and every woman have her own husband. So, it's possible even that he means that here.

But it was Peter in scripture who spoke of the wife as the weaker vessel. It was not Paul. Paul never uses the term vessel to our knowledge to refer to a wife.

That doesn't mean he wouldn't, but we don't have any case of him doing so. But we do have a case of him, as I said, in 2 Corinthians, talking about our bodies are like an earthen vessel. And while I can't be positive about this, my own cogitations on this verse and on the pros and cons of different arguments is that Paul is talking about our bodies.

He says that everyone should learn how to possess his own body in sanctification and honor. That he should be able to control himself, possess himself in a sanctified and honorable way. Now, there are many activities which Christians sometimes have allowed themselves that are sexual in nature, whether it's viewing certain provocative material, whether it's flirting, whether it is self-gratification, whatever it is.

There are certain things that some Christians have done that they've justified by saying there's nothing in the Bible that says I can't do this particular thing. And yet the Bible does say what I am supposed to do. And that is to possess my vessel in sanctification,

that's holiness, and in honor.

And I dare say that these so-called gray area activities that people don't know whether they're supposed to do them or not. One could ask, well, when you do these things, do you feel honorable? Is it something you'd like to go out and tell everyone about? When you do that, do you feel proud of it? Do you feel like you'd like everyone to know that you're doing this? Do you feel it's an honorable activity? The answer is almost certainly going to be no in most of these cases. If the answer is yes, then probably the activity is something innocent enough.

But Christians know better in their conscience. It's easy for Christians to make compromises with the excuse that the Bible doesn't explicitly say not to do this thing, this one thing. But they know very well in their conscience that they hope no one knows they're doing it because they don't feel honorable.

If somebody got up from the pulpit and announced that they had done that, if there's some activity in this category that you're involved with, and you went to church, and the pastor got up, and he announced that you, in the pews there, that you had done such and such a thing that week, would you feel like he was giving honor to whom honor was due? Or would you feel like you wanted to crawl through a crack in the floor? Well, that's one good test. How do I know if what I'm doing is sexually compromised? How do I know if it is in sanctification of honor? Well, ask yourself. Would you like the preacher to announce it from the pulpit next Sunday that you did that? If so, you probably felt it is an honorable thing.

When you do honorable things, you probably are glad the preacher tells people about it. But if it's something of which you'd be ashamed, then it doesn't sound like it's something that your conscience is clear about. Even though one may use all kinds of ingenious arguments to convince himself at the time of temptation that it's nothing wrong, yet it's clear that the conscience is not approving of this in cases like that.

Now, Christians do make compromises. They don't feel good about them. And if they're true Christians, they will repent of them.

But they do sometimes succumb to them. Paul knew this in Romans 7. He talked about how in his mind he agrees with the law of God, but that's not the only law going in him. He's got this other law in his members, in his flesh, that draws him another direction and entices him to do the wrong thing.

And so, we know that struggle. Anyone who says that they don't have that struggle, either they've had a breakthrough that I'm still awaiting, or else they're probably saying what they think Christians are supposed to say, believing that Christians should be beyond all that. As a matter of fact, Paul was not beyond all that.

And he had struggles with the law in his members, as well as, on the other hand, his desire to obey God and the law of God. In our culture, Christianity has been very compromised in this area, and I think it's worth asking why. What is it that has caused the church to go headlong into the same kind of sensuality, to a very large degree? I just read yesterday in somebody's newsletter, and he was trying to sell a tape, and he said, on this tape you'll hear about, and then he had a whole lot of bullets about things that are on this tape, things that are atrocities going on in the church.

And one of the things was that the pastor and his wife of a huge church in North Carolina put a bed on the stage and simulated sex acts for the congregation. I can't imagine who that was or why they did that, but I've heard of things almost that bizarre. That one tops them.

But I've heard of things that are not too far different than that. Youth groups, often, just like the churches for the adults, they cater to the more baser instincts, the more baser drives of the worldly people and of the Christians themselves to attract them to the meetings. Now, you live in a small town where the Christians don't do these kinds of things, I hope.

At least, I don't hear of it here, and I hope it isn't happening. It may be that you would hear of these things with disbelief. But if you go live in the big city for a while and visit some of the bigger churches, you'll start believing this could be true.

These stories could be true. They are happening. Because almost every kind of compromise is made in the interest of entertaining people, attracting people, holding people, making them feel glad they went to church and make them look forward to coming back again.

And much of what the church has done has been to exploit the illicit allurements of sex to advertise, just like the world does, Christian events. Now, even the churches that don't do that, many times, are doing something that is nonetheless an atrocity, and that is that they're not speaking out against that kind of activity. Now, I'll tell you this, that I have a radio program, and I don't use every day my radio program to speak out against homosexuality and adultery and things like that.

I mean, that comes up. People ask questions about that, and I certainly don't pull any punches about it. But I'm not saying that the church has, first of all, to go out and every time they address the world, they start condemning the world for its sexual practices.

There may be a call to do that. But the Bible says judgment must begin first at the house of God. And Paul said, what do I have to do to judge those who are outside the church? God judges them.

He says, we need to judge those inside. And in the context of that statement, which was

in 1 Corinthians 5, he was talking about sexual sin. There was in the church of Corinth an atrocious sexual sin.

And Paul said it was so heinous that even the Gentiles didn't do these kinds of things. And it was in that context that we have to judge ourselves. We have to judge those inside the church.

The church has to clean up its act. If the church is to become an alternative culture that speaks prophetically to the dominant culture, the church has to live its message. And to a very large degree, I'm not so critical of pastors that get up week after week and who do not address all the sin that's out there in the world.

Because, I mean, Paul said, who am I to judge those outside the church? The problem is when the pastor gets up and he knows there's a couple in the church who are committing adultery. He knows there are unrepentant homosexualities in his congregation. We're talking about some of the larger churches.

Pastors know about these things. They hear about these things. Sometimes these people come to him for counseling and don't repent.

And yet they won't address this sin in the church. And even if the church is not using sex to draw people in and to entertain people and so forth, they often are nonetheless compromising the distinctive message of the church by allowing illicit sex to be practiced among those that they know. Sometimes the preacher's own kids are the ones involved.

And this is, of course, making it impossible for the Christian community to be a culture of purity that speaks prophetically to and that confronts the culture of sensuality around us. The church itself to a large degree has succumbed. Now, why is this? Well, part of that, of course, is because Christians are human and they have drives.

However, Christians are supposed to know that having a drive does not produce an argument for doing a certain thing. There are many drives. We might have an urge to tell somebody off because we're angry at them.

But we know that the Bible tells us to be slow to speak and slow to rap. We have to withhold that drive. We might have a drive to eat nothing but chocolate for dinner.

But we know that there are other things that we ought to be eating and it wouldn't be a good stewardship or even a very good spiritual exercise for us to eat only such things as please the palate but don't nourish the body. And this is true in sexual activity too. We should understand that just because something is something that is an urge that is present, it is not necessarily something to be indulged.

Now, one of the reasons that Christians have fallen here is because they have succumbed to the cult of fun. The world is basically caught up in a religious cult of fun.

Now, what is fun? A lot of people may get the impression that I'm not in favor of fun.

My children quote this back to me quite a bit because I've told them so many times that fun is not an argument for doing something in itself. I hope I don't offend anyone by saying that. But there are good things that we can do that are also fun.

And there are things that are merely fun that are truly harmless. But to simply say that an activity is fun is not really an argument in its favor, in favor of doing it. Many things are fun that are illicit.

The only reason that Christians should do anything, the Bible says, is if they believe it is to the glory of God. Paul said, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God. Now, does that mean that we can't go swimming in the summertime or can't go skiing or can't go do this activity that's merely fun? Well, I don't think there's anything that is unglorifying to God about some of those activities at times.

But there might be times when it is not the thing that would most glorify God. It's not a matter of making issues like that black and white. Does it glorify God to ski? I don't know.

Maybe sometimes there might be some sense in which it does. Not being a skier myself, I really can't speak knowledgeably about that. But there are activities that are merely recreational that I will sometimes indulge in.

And I do so because I believe that is what God would have me to do. Either for the fellowship of the people or because my kids will enjoy it or maybe because I could stand to let my hair down and relax a little bit for a few minutes. There are times when God might be in favor of something recreational.

On the other hand, our culture does not have God in their thoughts. Fun is the whole argument for doing anything. And as I said earlier, one of the first things that people often ask an adult convert to Christianity, their old friends ask, well, what do you do for fun now? Well, I'm not sure that I do anything for fun.

I sure have a lot of enjoyment. If that's the same thing as fun, I don't know. What is fun? What is fun anyway? Is it enjoyment? If it's enjoyment, then I have fun all the time, almost.

I don't enjoy every moment, but I enjoy my life. I enjoy what I do. And I don't do anything just to enjoy it.

Enjoyment is a byproduct of doing what I think is worth doing, something that Christians ought to do. There's no reason why Christians should ever condemn fun if fun means enjoyment because we should enjoy God. We should enjoy whatever God gives us to do.

We should enjoy our work. We should enjoy our families. We should enjoy our friends.

We should enjoy maybe certain recreational activities. I'm not opposed to this. It's just that what I'm saying is we can affirm that it's okay to have fun or enjoyment doing something without embracing the value of fun in itself.

And that is where the world diverges from us. Sex is simply seen by the world as another way of having fun. It is sex for entertainment, whether it's actual sexual coitus or whether it is simply viewing things that are sexually arousing or whatever, just whatever it is, sex is put into the category of fun, and fun is what everything is about.

If you don't enjoy your work, you should change jobs, the world thinks. If you don't enjoy your spouse, you should change spouse, varieties of the spice of life. You should change spouses.

If you don't enjoy the house you live in, then you definitely need a better house. If you don't enjoy the hamburgers at a certain burger place, then you deserve to have it your way and go to another hamburger place. You need to enjoy everything because if you're not enjoying it, it's not worth doing because fun and enjoyment are the ultimate value that legitimizes all activity to the world.

Now, some Christians may pendulum swing from that and say, well, therefore, fun is the ultimate evil that illegitimizes all activity. But that's not true at all. God's presence is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore.

I'm all for having fun in an activity that is worth doing otherwise. I'm just not that much into having fun in an activity that doesn't have anything else to say in its favor than that it was fun. And it's not even that everything that is merely fun is bad.

Some people do like to do things that are merely fun, and I'm not going to condemn all that. Some of that can be quite okay. It's just that there are so many things that are worth doing for other reasons that I find just as fun as things that would be, on the other hand, just merely fun and aren't worth doing for any other reason.

I'd rather have fun doing that which is worth doing. I only have so many hours in the day. I might as well use as many of them as I can, having fun and being productive too.

Not everyone can do that. Not everyone is obsessed with that like I am, but I certainly would like to present that as an alternative value to that of the world because it is for the embracing of fun that the world has, and the church following the world, has embraced almost every kind of weirdness in terms of pursuit of sexual pleasure. And this intrudes into marriage as well.

I remember, as I said, when I got married the first time, I was a teenager. I had just turned 19 when I got married. I was a virgin, so I didn't have any sexual experience.

There were quite a few, at that time, books written by Christian authors for Christian couples, for inexperienced Christians, inexperienced in terms of sex, about marital sex. I remember seeing at least three of them. I don't remember all their titles.

One of them was by the Légez. It was called The Act of Marriage. Another one was by another author whose name I forget.

It was called Intended for Pleasure. There was another smaller book. I don't remember the author or the name of.

But I know that back when I got married, I was acquainted with these books. I was made acquainted with them. And the message that I got from these books, to a large extent, was it's okay for Christians to enjoy sex in marriage.

Well, I never doubted that, so the message was not necessarily one on me. But the books almost bent over backward to give the impression that, you know, Christians should have every bit as much fun in their marital sex as the world does. Now, again, I'm not even opposed to that message.

The problem with it is, and I'm not saying these books intended to put this across, but I've seen a whole generation of Christian couples that have been raised on this kind of literature. Many Christian couples get the impression that sex within marriage is primarily for fun. You know, if when... I think it was... what's the guy's name? It was Dr. Wheat who wrote Intended for Pleasure.

Is that the guy's name? When he wrote that book, he was countering something in the Christian culture where Christians were all bound up and uptight about sex. And even in marriage, they just felt like they couldn't enjoy themselves because it made them feel guilty. Maybe there was some cultural thing back then, before I was old enough to know of it, that was in the church.

The book is not needed anymore. Most Christians I know are as sold on pleasure in sex and marriage as they need to be. And maybe more so.

Now, am I going to come here and write a book not intended for pleasure? No, not at all. It's obvious. When God made man and woman, He made them not only obligated to have a sexual relationship, He commanded them to, but He made them with all the equipment that they possess to this day that made it pleasurable.

He intended for them to have pleasure. The problem is, to say that God made sex for the sake of pleasure would be like saying God made food for the sake of pleasure. Well, that's not quite telling the whole story, is it? Is food for pleasure? Well, of course God wants us to enjoy our food.

That's why He gave us taste buds. That's why He made such a variety of flavors. It's very

clear that God is interested in us enjoying the activities that He wants us involved in.

And He's made many of them sensually pleasurable to us. But to say that God made food for the sake of pleasure is to miss the point altogether. And people who actually adopt that view, well, they lapse into things like not only gluttony, but bulimia and anorexia.

Well, not anorexia, but bulimia, where they just eat and eat for pleasure. They go and vomit it up so they can eat some more. They don't want any nutrition.

They just want the pleasure. Because to them, food was created for pleasure. And the same idea exists among those who believe that sex is merely for pleasure.

It's not merely for pleasure. It is intended for pleasure, but it was intended for something even more than that. Something that it functions in even in times when it isn't pleasurable.

And that is, at least it potentially can, and that is, of course, for procreation. When God made a man and a woman, He commanded them to procreate. When He mentions how opposed He is to divorce in Malachi chapter 2, He says He hates divorce.

He says because God made the two, the man and the wife, one. He says, and why did He make them one? Because He sought godly offspring. It's obvious that sex is intended for pleasure, but it has even a more lofty value than that.

Pleasure itself is not a value to be pursued. If you make pleasure a value to pursue, eventually the arguments begin to erode against doing certain things that are more or less seemingly gray area things that are pleasurable, but maybe otherwise would not have anything good to say about them. In these books that I read when I was young, it seemed like they all wanted to make a point of saying that there is nothing forbidden within marriage in the sexual area to the couple, and that anything that unbelievers might enjoy sexually in marriage or even outside of marriage, a married couple whose Christian might legitimately enjoy between themselves.

I don't remember. I don't want to misrepresent these books. I don't remember them giving any caveats or any exceptions to this.

Of course, there's some pretty kinky, weird stuff that unbelievers enjoy these days. Some of it would seem very strange to think of Christians doing even within marriage. The reason is, I say it would seem strange.

I didn't condemn it because I'm not going to draw lines for other people, but let me give you some biblical principle here. I think that while indeed God wants couples who are married to enjoy their sexual relationship, He doesn't want their sexual relationship to degenerate into merely a pleasure fest. There's a more exalted reason for sex than that,

and pleasure is a byproduct, just like there's a more exalted reason for eating food than just to enjoy it.

The exalted reason is to nourish your body and to be healthy, to sustain life. That's certainly a more honorable reason to eat. And if you were starving to death and the only food you found was unpalatable, you'd still eat it because you know my body needs food for other reasons than just pleasure.

It has a more fundamental use than just to enjoy it. And that's true also, I believe, of sex. God made sex for a purpose and He made it pleasurable.

I think a very strong argument could be made that God made both sex and eating pleasurable for the same reason. They both had to be done for the good of humanity. If sex was not pleasurable and husbands and wives decided they didn't care for it and no one was really attracted to it, we probably would... the human race would come to an end in a few generations in all likelihood.

And likewise, if food wasn't pleasurable, we might forget to eat it and we might be unhealthy or starve ourselves. We've got to realize that God has purposes higher than our purposes. We enjoy the pleasure aspect, but God has purposes that we need to discern.

And when we say, well, what about even among a married couple? What should they do? Well, far be it from me to go into somebody's bedroom and tell them what they can do or can't do. But let me just say this, many activities that the world does are designed strictly for the purpose of pleasure and entirely divorcing sexuality from its real purpose, which is procreation. Now, eating a chocolate bar divorces eating from its real purpose too.

I'm not going to say it's a sin to have a chocolate bar once in a while. But if you replace a healthy diet with one of merely chocolate bars, then I would say that there's something a little twisted there, something a little out of sync in the way you're thinking about eating. And in terms of eating, whether you eat or drink to all the glory of God, I don't think it glorifies God for you to take the real purpose of eating and replace it with a different purpose that's more pleasing to you.

And I would say the same thing about sexuality, even within marriage, that while I don't think that all sexual activity between a husband and wife has to be potentially reproductive, and I'm not one who believes it's a sin to use birth control, though my wife and I have never used it and don't approve of it ourselves, I'm not saying that people who do use it are doing something wrong. It depends on why they're using it and how they're using it. To use birth control is like eating a chocolate bar.

Is it a sin? I don't know it to be a sin, but if it's the only way we did things, then one

might wonder, well, what is it that we have changed sex into from what God intended it to be? What is it we've changed eating into from what God intended it to be? Now, I suspect one of the reasons that the church has fallen into the same degradation sexually and impurity that the dominant culture has is because the church at some point divorced, in its mind, divorced sexuality from procreation. You see, in societies where sex is primarily seen as a means of procreation, which is what it was invented for, then a man and a wife, when they come together intimately, are at least potentially going to create another life. Now, you know, after menopause and certain other circumstances, obviously they know they're not going to create another life, but, I mean, those are specialized seasons of life and so forth.

But, in general, when people know that they might create another life, then the activity is more than just a pleasure fest between them. It is a sacred working together with God in bringing about another generation, hopefully of godly offspring. That's what God has in mind for it.

That's what he created it for, that he sought godly offspring. Now, I think that in societies where sex is seen primarily as a means of procreation and secondarily as a pleasurable activity, womanhood is esteemed more by men. And sex is usually associated with motherhood in the thinking of the society.

I'm not saying that every individual man thinks purely about every individual woman. I'm just saying that the cultural consensus is that sex is about motherhood and fatherhood. And women, then, are not just seen as objects of pleasure.

They are seen as partners in parenthood. And when a culture decides that sex is not really for procreation, what it's really for is just for two people to have a good time. And marriage is so they can have a good time on a regular basis, legally.

I'm not saying that everyone who adopts that attitude goes down that slippery slope to all the other things, but I think the culture does. I think when the culture has suddenly not thought any more of sex as a procreative activity but merely as a pleasurable activity, suddenly women are viewed by men generally as objects for pleasure rather than as esteemed in the esteemed role of motherhood. And when having children is no longer considered to be an integral part of having sex, then there's really no reason to limit sex to that environment which is a good place to bring up children, namely the family.

You know, as long as you can prevent conception and as long as the whole culture believes that sex is principally for pleasure, well, hey, what if sex within marriage isn't so pleasurable anymore? What if it seems more pleasurable that my secretary or this neighbor's wife or someone else might give me more pleasure or another guy? If I'm kinky enough. I mean, what are the arguments against it? You know, when people say, well, Steve, I don't quite agree with you that sex is primarily for procreation. Let me ask

you, why did God forbid bestiality and homosexuality and premarital sex and extramarital sex and adultery? Why are those things wrong? Why are they wrong? Well, of course, the dutiful Christian answer is, well, they're wrong because God commanded us not to do them.

Fine. Okay. Excellent.

But there's another question. Why did God command us not to do them? God is a reasonable God. If God made sex principally for pleasure, didn't he know that some people are so perverted that they find more pleasure in a same-sex relationship? Why deprive them of this pleasure? Why did God forbid these things? I'm going to suggest an answer that I don't think anyone can come up with a better one biblically, and that is because these things are not procreative relationships.

Procreation is impossible in a homosexual relationship, in a bestial relationship, and undesirable in a relationship outside of marriage where children would be raised without two parents. I believe that marriage is the environment that God made not only for sex but for bringing up children. And when you begin to think of sexuality as primarily God's ingenious plan for procreation, it becomes something that you can be fascinated with at a different level than just sensuality.

Now, I'm not among those who believe that Christian married couples should avoid creativity in their sex life. I would say this though, that the more a person comes to appreciate the procreative potential and purpose of sex, the less creativity is necessary to make it a fulfilling activity because the fulfillment comes not so much from the hormonal pleasure. The fulfillment comes from doing an act that is procreative with God.

We could say co-creative with God. When a baby is conceived, that is an act of God with which two people cooperated and they co-created another human being with God. That to me is, frankly because I love children and I always wish I had more, to me that's an amazing privilege.

Now, some might think that would make sexuality rather sterile. I don't think of it only in terms of potentially having children. I don't see it only in those terms.

Let me get that straight. When my wife gets past menopause, I will know that there's no possibility of procreation but we're not going to discontinue our physical relationship for the rest of our lives. It's not the only reason.

It's just the primary reason, as near as I can tell biblically. And it is because our culture has, and the church has followed the culture, divorced the concept of sex from procreation, that sex becomes just another form of enjoyment and that's really what it's primarily for. And as long as it's seen primarily for that purpose, then what's to say that the most enjoyable form of it would be within marriage? Well, actually, very few

arguments could be made that would convince most people that the only enjoyable kind of sex would be within marriage.

And if sex is for enjoyment, then what arguments can be made for keeping it within marriage except that, well, God commands it and you're naughty if you don't do it. Well, it's not just a matter of bare legalistic obedience to the commands of God we're talking about here. It's getting God's vision for His purpose for sex and having something distinctive to say to the world about the subject.

Now, I don't want anyone to feel badly, at least not based on what I'm saying, about if they use birth control. There may be good reasons why some people use some birth control. I'm not saying that they can't do that.

Just like I'm not saying they can't eat a chocolate bar. What I'm saying, it's the mentality I'm concerned about. Someone says, do you think it's wrong to use birth control? I say, the Bible does not forbid birth control.

I cannot forbid birth control because the Bible does not forbid it. But I will say this. The Bible does say that even a neutral or a good activity can be turned bad if it's done for bad motives.

Even giving alms or offering a sacrifice to God can be a stink in His nostrils if it's done with an evil motivation, the Bible says. And so the issue is not, is it okay to use birth control? My question would be, well, why do you want to? And that's not really any of my business. But I'd have to know the answer before I can tell you whether I'm in favor of it in your case.

And it's not my place to be in favor. I don't want to tell people what they can or cannot do. But I certainly want to stir up your godly minds to challenge the world's way of thinking about this because it is for lack of challenging the world's way of thinking about it that the church has lost its bearings on this subject and doesn't know that it's on a slippery slope down to total immorality, forsaking its birthright of purity and basically disqualifying itself to speak to the world prophetically.

In one of those areas of the world, most needs to hear God's message. Let me talk about entertainment for a moment. I mentioned the cult of fun.

Well, fun is a word that's usually associated with some form of entertainment. I hope I made myself clear. I'm not against fun.

I am against making a value out of fun and making fun an argument for doing something that would not otherwise have anything in its favor. But I'm not against having fun. And thus, I'm not even against entertainment.

I would say, though, that we live in an entertainment culture. And anyone could see this

without me telling them that if they just reflect on it. We have a culture of abundant leisure.

We have labor-saving devices. We've got a 40-hour or shorter work week, most of us do. Even those of us who don't have a lot of money, most of us can sustain our livelihood if we would.

I can't, but most people can on a 40-hour work week. And in the cities, of course, in corporate America, there's all kinds of lobbying for shorter work weeks and more vacations and longer weekends and longer coffee breaks and so forth because it can be done. We can get a lot more done in less hours than used to be possible in a pre-industrialized culture.

We have machines. We've learned how to be more efficient. We can go places faster and get things done more.

We've got telephones and email and stuff. You can get a whole lot more done in a shorter period of time now than used to be possible. And that being so means we've got a ton of leisure on our hands.

Now, leisure can be used a variety of ways. It can be used profitably or it can be used unprofitably. Or maybe it can be used in a neutral way that's neither profitable nor unprofitable.

Since the Christian value is to do all things to the glory of God, it should always be our concern that whatever we do is in some sense profitable for the kingdom of God. It may be that sitting and watching a video movie can be profitable if you're so strung out from hard work that nothing would actually relax you more. And you need nothing more than you need a bit of relaxation at this moment.

I'm not going to argue for that, but that's an argument I would listen to if someone was trying to convince me that they need more of that. I don't want you to think I don't watch videos. I do.

But my problem is that most of our leisure is given to one form of entertainment or another in our culture. I'm not going to say this is true of you. Many of you are unusual in our culture, even unusual in the church.

That's why I'm here. That's why I like this church. It's different.

What I would say about most Christians may not be true of this group here to the same degree. But most Christians watch just about as much television as non-Christians do. Most Christians are as addicted to having music and noise and stimulation in their environment as a non-Christian is.

Most Christians are as hooked on sports as non-Christians are. These are all forms of entertainment. Are they bad? Well, that depends.

I couldn't just say television is bad. We know that a lot of television is bad, and I'm not sure that very much of it is good. But the fact is, it's not even a matter of is this evil.

It's a question of is this what we're supposed to be doing with the time that God has given us. We are, of all people who have ever lived on the earth, the ones in possession of the most leisure time, and therefore the most opportunity to make progress for the kingdom of God and to use our time profitably. When people in past times had to work 72-hour weeks just to put food on the table, they didn't have much opportunity, in addition to working in the rice paddies, to go out and do anything profitable for the kingdom of God beyond feeding their family.

And by the way, feeding your family is profitable for the kingdom of God. But we can do that with much less of our time. We can even retire young.

Many of us can retire when we're in our fifties. And then we have nothing but leisure time left. Now my dad would not say he has leisure time since he's retired, because he's had to reorganize the stuff in his garage about four or five times since he retired, and he's had to repaint that deck and do things around the house.

He's always busy. But really the things he's doing are not necessary for survival. They're not even necessary for comfort.

They're just things to do. And I'm not criticizing him. He's a good man.

He's a Christian. But like many of us feel that, well, I earned this time off. Therefore, I ought to be able to do something that I like to do.

Well, I hope you like to do things that are profitable, because the time is going to come when we're going to have to give an account for our stewardship. And we've heard it many times about money, because churches give sermons about tithing from time to time, and they call it stewardship sermons. And what they really are talking about is the need for people to give money to the church.

But we've heard of stewardship as it applies to money, but we have to also consider stewardship as it applies to time, because time is a commodity. Every bit as valuable as money. In fact, to a very large extent, time is money.

And so if we are ever so faithful in giving of our money to God, but our time we consider to be our own, we're missing the point of stewardship. And the Bible says that time is going to come when we have to give an account for our stewardship. The Master who doled out to us this luxury, this leisure, this time, these opportunities, He's going to come and He's going to say, Well, you had a lot more than almost everybody else who ever

lived on the earth had.

I hope you got a lot done. And we're going to have to say, Well, here's what we've got. And if what we've done is entertained ourselves to death, it's not likely that we're going to have an awful lot to present.

And there's going to be a fair bit of shame on our part. But I'm just warning you in advance. I mean, I'm not making this up.

This is in the Bible, you know. I'm not condemning. I'm just saying if I didn't know, I'd want to be warned.

I'm just doing to my brother what I would have done to me. If I didn't know this already, I'd want someone to tell me this. And that is that you are going to give an account for your time.

And let's face it, some things that are entertaining can also be profitable. There's educational activities that are fun. There are even physical activities that are fun and good for us physically.

To exercise is good. Probably to play in sports is good in measure because of the things it does to keep us in good health and so forth in a very sedentary society like ours. There are many things that are fun that are probably profitable.

The question is, is that really how we choose our activities? Are we choosing our activities because they are profitable or are we choosing them because they're fun? If we're choosing them because they're fun, then we are being very much creatures of our own culture, not our Christian culture, our dominant culture, which worships fun and worships entertainment. And it is basically what everyone wants more of, more leisure so that they can have more entertainment. And I would just urge you to be careful about that.

Paul said in Ephesians 5.16, we need to redeem the time because the days are evil. Ephesians 5.16, redeeming the time for the days are evil. We need to buy back the time.

It slips through our fingers so quickly. We need to seize it as much as we can and use it to counteract the trend of evil in our day. Also, we need to guard our hearts and steward our hearts well.

It says in Proverbs 4.23, Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. To be pure and to live pure lives, we need to keep our hearts pure. We need to protect our hearts from impurities.

Many forms of entertainment assault the heart with impurity. They assault our modesty. Our natural sense of modesty is attacked and eroded by most forms of entertainment

that we can get a hold of.

You might say, Well, I don't watch those kinds of television programs. Well, if you watch commercial TV, you're going to see commercials. The program you're watching may be ever so wholesome, but it's not likely commercials are going to be ever so wholesome.

Your sense of modesty is going to be modified by overexposure, indecent exposure. There's a fair bit of indecent exposure we all get from television, from movies, from music, from magazines. Sometimes the cover alone is enough.

The covers of magazines that are not today regarded as pornography, Time Magazine, Newsweek Magazine, People Magazine, Self Magazine, the tablets, these are not generally called pornography. You can see these magazines in the most respectable of establishments, but sometimes the covers alone, to say nothing of the stories and the pictures inside, are enough to assault the modesty to a point where you either have to be shocked and walk out in disgust, or you have to numb yourself to it. And numbing yourself is what most of us have done.

And once you get numb, you are less spiritually alive and alert than you were before. I've heard people say, well, I can watch R-rated movies, and I know there's some bad language in there, I know there's a fair bit of nudity, and there's suggested immorality and so forth, but I'm just the same way, it doesn't affect me. And I say, shame on you if it doesn't affect you.

It should shock you, it should appall you. It appalls God. God is disgusted, God is angry at sinners every day.

If you can watch what disgusts God and you're not disgusted, shame on you. If you can more than not be disgusted, if you can be entertained, double shame on you. But you see, I would imagine that everyone here, if you've been a Christian for, let's say, 10, 20 years, if you've been a Christian a long time, I'll bet there are some things, I hope this isn't true.

Maybe I'm just reflecting my own degeneracy, but I hope this isn't true of you. But I wouldn't be surprised if there are some things that you will look at in a magazine that if you had seen them 10 years ago in a magazine, you would have been shocked and would have thought, that's pornography. As a Christian, I can't look at that.

But we get numbed and we get calloused from such exposure. Steve was just saying in the pulpit the other day, as postmaster and postal workers, they have to sort magazines all the time and they are, as a necessity of their job, they are exposed to these images, sometimes for extended periods of time. This is something that's very, very challenging, I'm sure.

And that's what Steve was saying. It is challenging. It's challenging enough for me just to

stand in the checkout line and see a magazine cover for the few minutes that I'm there.

And generally speaking, I have to make sure that I don't see them for the few minutes that I'm there. But we are assaulted by indecent exposure in television, movies, music, magazines, catalogs. Oh, that's one we've got to think about a minute here.

Catalogs are innocent. All they do is present to us opportunities to buy wholesome things like clothing. Clothing is good.

There's all kinds of wonderful things. Direct mail is all the rage now. You can get all kinds of great things if you have the right catalogs.

Of course, you have to look at the catalogs in order to benefit from anything, buying them. And it's been a long time since I saw a catalog that was entirely free from images that were immodest. I mean, I sometimes get a men's clothing catalog in the mail once in a while, and usually there's nothing in there that I can't look at.

But unless it's distinctly a men's clothing catalog, there's very few catalogs anymore that I can safely just look at. And I'm getting to a place now where I just throw them in the trash, even though I'm curious about what's in there sometimes. A lot of them I just throw in the trash because I realize that that catalog, I might as well buy pornography as a look at that catalog.

I'm not even talking about women's underwear. I'm talking about just women's clothing many times. These are the ways in which entertainment bombards our sensitivities and assaults our modesty.

I'd like you to look at Psalm 101, if you would. This is a very important verse. It's one of the best verses I know to reel in my curiosity when I'm tempted to look at something, a magazine or whatever that I ought not.

Psalm 101. This is Psalm of David. There's a lot of good stuff in this psalm, but we won't read the whole thing.

We've got too little time. We're almost done here tonight. In Psalm 101, verses 2 through 4, he says, I will behave wisely in a perfect way.

Oh, when will you come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set nothing wicked before my eyes. I hate the work of those who fall away.

It shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me. I will not know wickedness.

Now, what a set of resolutions for a godly man to make. He says, I'm going to walk before God in my house with a perfect heart. And among the things I'm going to do to keep my heart pure are the following.

I'm going to set nothing wicked before my eyes. Boy, is that hard to do now in our society. But what would it be like if every Christian resolved to this? I'm not going to look at anything wicked.

Well, most of them are not going to have TVs for very long. I'm not saying a Christian can't have a TV. Some people may be stronger than I am.

But I think most Christians would probably not be able to keep their TV if they're really going to live up to this standard. Whatever is wicked, I'm not going to look at it. There are not going to be too many things you can watch that aren't.

There are some things. And I believe there are true Christians, good Christians, who restrict their viewing habits in a way that I probably would not if I had a TV. That's why I've never owned a TV.

I knew I couldn't. I'm not strong enough. So I can't bring one of those into my house.

But some people are stronger than I am. And I'm not saying... When I see someone who has a TV, it doesn't make me... I don't judge them at all. I just assume they must be stronger than I am.

And they probably are. It doesn't take much to be stronger than I am. But magazines, catalogs, all kinds of things can be wicked things in the sense of what they do to us, the part of us they appeal to.

And I will set nothing like that before my eyes. That means I'm not even going to look at these things. I'm not going to lay my eyes on them.

What a standard. I hate the work of those who fall away. It shall not cling to me.

You know, this is an important thing. If I'm watching a movie and there is some suggestion of illicit sexuality or other kind of corruption, it should be that I hate that. That's the actions of those who have fallen away from God.

I should hate the work of those who fall away and it should not cling to me. If I can watch that and it doesn't bother me, it's clinging to me. It's taking up residence in me.

I'm not shocked anymore. I'm not appalled anymore. Now I'll tell you this.

I can watch some videos that in general are edifying to me, positively, where there is criminal activity or other kind of activity that I don't approve of. And I am shocked by that bad behavior. But the overall message of the story and so forth is in general edifying.

And I sometimes make a trade-off. Then I say, it's a positive spiritual experience for me to watch this. There are good lessons I'm learning and it's worth watching as a Christian

as I have to evaluate this thing, even though there are some things that bother me in it.

But they may not bother me in the sense of tempting me. If I watch a movie and one of the things that happens in the movie is someone gets murdered, that bothers me deeply, but it doesn't tempt me. I'm not tempted to go out and commit murder.

Some people might be, in which case they shouldn't watch it. But if it begins to cling to me, if the violence or anything of the behavior of bad people in the movie begins to seem less objectionable to me, then I'm not hating the works of those who fall away. It is clinging to me.

It's becoming part of me. And he says, A perverse heart shall depart from me. I will not know wickedness.

he didn't just say corrupt works, but a corrupt heart. I'm not going to allow myself to be entertained by people whose actions, maybe they're not actually acting out sin, but it's very clear that the whole plot of it is their hearts are corrupt, they're evil. I don't want that.

I don't want that in my life. Now, have I always lived up to this standard? No. No, I haven't.

I've seen many movies that I've regretted seeing. I'm not sure I've seen the last one. Maybe I'll get smart someday and just throw the video out too.

I don't have a TV, but I have a monitor. And I have a video. Maybe someday I'll get real smart and throw the whole thing out.

Because I can't imagine missing anything of value by doing that. I'd have to fight some of the members of my family to do that at this point. But the day may come where I have to do that.

I will not know wickedness. Sometimes we feel like we have to see the latest movie, even though it may have some corruption, because everybody's talking about it. Everybody knows what's going on.

I don't want to be left out. David says, I don't want to know wickedness. That's not for me to know.

We have to recognize there is a process of desensitization that takes place to us. And it's very important that we recognize that entertainment is not something that people have always had a lot of. I'm not saying people didn't always enjoy it when they had it.

But in most cultures, in most of history, entertainment came seldom. And it was short-lived. But it was maybe spiced up, or rather drab existence otherwise.

We live in a culture that is full of entertainment. And we have to realize that what we like about entertainment is that it does something to us. It actually does something to us.

I think what it does is a drug reaction. I think it's adrenaline. I think that we get addicted to the drug adrenaline, which is natural enough, but it's a bit consciousness-altering, slightly.

The main thing is not so much the problem it causes by being consciousness-altering, but the problem it causes of addictiveness. Eventually, the same amount of stimulus does not produce the same adrenaline rush. So I need something more stimulating.

It's just like any drug. The same amount of adrenaline doesn't do it for me. I need more adrenaline.

It's not enough anymore to watch cowboys and Indians shooting each other. Now I need to see people using high-tech weapons and killing, you know, thousands of people, you know, with these weapons, and that's more thrilling. Eventually, that won't be enough, and I'll have to go to snuff flicks before I get the same charge.

Or maybe video games. But the fact is that once we become addicted to entertainment, we're really addicted probably. I'm guessing.

But it's an educated guess. I think we're addicted to a chemical. I think we're addicted to what adrenaline does to us.

And we become desensitized to that, just like we become desensitized to any drug that's used on a regular basis. Let me give you a few scriptures real quickly, with which I'm going to close, about this process of desensitization that we eventually... It starts out that we're not shocked anymore by immorality. And once we're no longer shocked, eventually there begins a slippery slope where we no longer have many defenses against it in our own lives.

In Romans chapter 1, beginning with verse 22... No, I'll start in verse 24. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness in the lusts of their hearts to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forevermore. Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions, for even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men, committing what is shameful and receiving in themselves the penalties of their error which is as due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do things which are not fitting, being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, a long list of the bad things.

Down to verse 32... Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them. There are two sins here. One is you do those things that are worthy of death.

There is another one and that is approving of others that do it. Isn't that often what we are doing when we are entertained by certain kinds of films and so forth? We are not committing the acts that they are committing on the screen, but they are. Are we disapproving? Why are we paying them to do it then by renting the video? Why are we paying them to do what we don't approve of them doing? The fact of the matter is we have ceased to disapprove strongly enough.

We have become numb to it. We have been given over because we didn't catch ourselves at a certain level. We have been given over to a more debased position until we are filled with all unrighteousness and immorality and so forth.

And it is seen in the fact that we not only do these things. Some people don't do them, but they do approve of those who do them secretly. Secretly approve.

We could say, oh, isn't it disgusting, that new movie, but I want to see it again. I don't want anyone to know I want to see it again because as a Christian I am not supposed to approve of those things, but I need to check my own heart out. Let me turn you to a passage in Ephesians.

Two passages in Ephesians and we will be done. I have already run a little over time, I think. Ephesians 4, verses 17 through 20 says, This I say therefore in testifying the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind.

That is the emptiness of their mind. Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, and because of the blindness of their heart, who, notice this phrase, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to the work of all uncleanness with greediness, that you have not so learned Christ. Now, we are not supposed to be like the Gentiles.

That means we could be if we are not careful. We are warned not to be like them. What are they like? Well, they have given themselves over to their lusts and to their lewdness, and they have come to a place where their minds have been darkened, their eyes have been blinded, and they are past feeling.

That means they are past spiritual sensitivity. They have become numb. By total overexposure and overindulgence to this wickedness, their sensitivities and natural modesty and natural conscience on these matters has been eroded completely.

They are past the point of feeling. I dare say that many of us are far closer to that point

in our own lives than we ever dreamed we would allow ourselves to become because we have been overexposed to things that we once would have been shocked by but we have decided not to be shocked anymore. Or maybe we have not made a conscious decision.

Maybe it has just happened. Just this continual bombardment and the failure to guard our hearts has made us by tiny increments begin to first not disapprove as much as we once did, not be as shocked as we once were, not be as critical of that behavior as we once were, and then by stages to almost approve it and find it entertaining and maybe something that we would do if temptation was strong enough and the circumstances were right. This is the way down.

And Christians are supposed to be on the way up. One other passage in Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 11 and 12, "...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." Now the works of darkness, what is to be objected to them? They are unfruitful. We should be involved in works that are fruitful, productive for the kingdom of God.

But the works of darkness, they are unfruitful. That is about the most bad thing you can say about them here. They are unfruitful works of darkness, rather expose them, for it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

I have to confess to you, I have been numb to the point where I can speak without shame about things that are done by certain sinners. It ought to be embarrassing to speak of those things. I have been bombarded.

I have been numb to a certain extent. But that does not make it okay. That does not make it something I can say, so it is okay for you guys to do too.

No, I need to get unnumbed. I need to be resensitized. I need to re-educate my conscience and re-activate my modesty and get to the place where I am as ashamed as Paul said I should be to even speak of the things that are done by people in darkness.

We can talk about such things. We can listen to jokes about such things, sometimes without blushing. This ought not so to be.

It is amazing how many Christians when they give their testimony can tell about all the horrible things they did before they were saved. In the 70s, a lot of people I knew came out of drug backgrounds. It seemed like you would often hear these people surrounding their testimonies.

We used to call them drug-a-monies because it seemed like these guys were spending more time comparing how many hits of acid each of them had taken before they came to Christ than they were really glorifying God. There should be shame in this. It is a shame to speak of these things.

I am not saying that we should never speak of them. Paul spoke of them, but he spoke of them as something shameful. We can come to the place where we are past feeling like the Gentiles where we do not feel that shame about these things anymore.

So, we need to guard our hearts. There is more I want to say on this subject, but I have run out of time for tonight.