

Personal Purity in Thought, Speech, and Appearance

I'm going to be speaking today about personal purity, specifically as it relates to our thoughts, our speech, and our appearance. It's not intended to be a comprehensive study on the subject, but I hope to touch on some areas in which Christians have become slack, and I hope to spur us on to continually strive for obedience to God in every area of our lives.

I think it's easy for us to hear general statements like "Pursue holiness!" or "Let everything you do be in obedience to God's Word!" without really getting down to specifics. And I've also found that when you get down to specifics, to everyday life issues, and make statements concerning these things, you sometimes get accused of being a legalist or a fundamentalist or a person who has a list of do's and don't's. But I've also found that when there is no emphasis on specifics, more and more licentiousness is tolerated, leading to out-and-out immorality.

And speaking of out-and-out immorality, it's also easy for a preacher or teacher to stand up and condemn the blatant sins of immorality, while the audience nods in agreement. But it gets a little stickier when the sins mentioned are the ones of thought, speech, and appearance. But they are vitally important, so I'll attempt to go through some of them.

Before I get into specifics, I want to mention something about how personal purity fits into Sovereign Grace theology. Those who like to caricature Sovereign Grace people say that the doctrines of predestination and perseverance lead to a lack of emphasis on personal purity. My answer is — No, it is the wicked heart that leads to a lack of emphasis on personal purity. Predestination and perseverance are totally compatible with a believer's striving after holiness and purity. In fact, a lack of this motivation towards holiness and purity betrays an unregenerate heart. 1 John 2:4-6 says that *"The one saying, I have known Him, and not keeping His commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that one. But whoever keeps His Word, truly in this one the love of God has been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him. The [one] claiming to rest in Him ought so to walk himself as that [One] walked."*

Keep in mind that true Christians do not strive to obey God's commandments out of any notion that our pursuit of godliness in any way saves us, keeps us saved, or recommends us to God. This would be legalism. Salvation is conditioned on nothing in us; it is totally conditioned on the blood and imputed righteousness of Christ. We strive for purity out of a love for God who saved us and out of assurance that we will cross the finish line not based on anything we do or anything done in us, but solely by the blood and imputed righteousness of Christ.

The guarantee of perseverance by the Spirit that God sovereignly placed in our hearts does not negate nor diminish the commands to walk in holiness. And if we do not walk in holiness, we prove that we do not have the Spirit. And a mark of being Spirit-filled, along with belief of the true gospel, is the desire to conform every single part of our lives to the holiness commanded by God.

I'm not planning to go into any more Scripture regarding general statements about holiness and purity, although you know that there are many such statements in Scripture. I'm going to go right

to some specifics. And for each of the three areas on which I'm going to be speaking, I'm going to give one example of each.

First, our thoughts. There have been and still are some professing Christians who believe that concupiscence is not sin. Concupiscence is the first movement and tendencies of evil desire. John Wesley and the Roman Catholic Church are two examples of the view that concupiscence is not sin. And modern evangelicalism has bought this lie. This is why, when I was doing my research on the so-called "Christian" psychology movement, I encountered many books that said that when a man is sexually attracted to another man, that initial attraction is not sin.

Matthew 5:27-28 says, "*You have heard that it was said to the ancients: 'Do not commit adultery.' But I say to you, Everyone looking at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" Here Jesus plainly puts forth the truth that just looking on someone in a sexual way is the same thing as raping that person in your thoughts. And when the father warns his son about the harlot in Proverbs 6:25, he says, "*Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, and do not let her take you with her eyelids.*" It is sin to look on a person and be lustfully attracted to that person's looks. But pop-Christianity, far from teaching this, actually openly encourages the sin. The so-called "ministry" of God-hating Arminians such as James Dobson is full of this stuff.

How many times have you heard jokes and stories, even from the pulpit, about being attracted to a woman, and that attraction is seen as innocent? How many times have we heard the prevailing view that teenagers' attractions to those of the opposite sex are good and should be encouraged? Yet Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:22 to flee youthful lusts! How many times have we heard the words "sexy" or "cute" or "good-looking" when one person describes another person of the opposite sex? These words betray a thought life that is full of filth.

So, Marc, what are you saying? Are heterosexual attractions sin? It's not me who said it; it's Christ who said it. Of course, he was not talking about such attraction within the bonds of a man and a woman who are committed to each other for life, for we find in other places that the marriage bed is not sinful, and thus those thoughts are not sinful in that context. But everything outside of this commitment is wickedness.

Does the dating scene encourage such wickedness? Definitely. Do church formals and dances encourage such wickedness? Definitely. Do singles ministries encourage such wickedness? Definitely. These are things of the world that have no place in Christian circles.

We are not only to *act* more godly — we are also to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). And the way we do this is found in Philippians 4:8-9: "*For the rest, brothers, whatever is true, whatever honorable, whatever [is] right, whatever pure, whatever lovely, whatever of good report, if [of] any virtue, and if [of] any praise, think on these things. And what things you learned and received and heard and saw in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*" How are we to have our mind dwell on pure

things when we're sitting in front of a television show or movie that shows lust or sex? Or violence, for that matter. A mark of a maturing Christian is an increased distaste for such things. Would you have two people come into your living room and perform sexual acts in front of you? Would you have someone come into your living room and murder someone in front of you? Yet that is exactly what you're doing when you invite the TV shows into your house that contain these things. The first part of Psalm 101:3 says, "*I will set no wicked thing before my eyes.*" Wow — can we really truthfully say that about ourselves? Is this a statement we can make before God with a clear conscience? "I will set no wicked thing before my eyes." I think we have some repenting to do.

The last part of Romans 16:19 says, "*But I desire you to be truly wise [as] to good, but simple toward evil.*" We are to be wise concerning what is good, and *simple* — *naïve* — concerning evil. Watching filth, whether sexual or violent, is disobedience to this command. It reminds me of the passage in Ephesians 5:12 that says that it's a shame to even *speak* of the things that are done by wicked people in secret. We must strive to have pure thoughts and to dwell on pure things.

Secondly, we come to purity in our speech. I'm going to focus on one area in which many of us think we don't have a problem, and that is truthfulness. Ephesians 4:22-25 says, "*For you have put off the old man, as regards the former behavior, having been corrupted according to the deceitful lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man, [which] according to God [was] created in righteousness and true holiness. Therefore, putting off the false, speak truth each with his neighbor, because we are members of one another.*" Colossians 3:9-10 says, "*Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his practices, and having put on the new, having been renewed in full knowledge according to [the] image of the [One] creating him.*" What is a lie? What is falsehood? Well, it's the opposite of truth, right? When someone tells a lie, he is saying something that is not true. Now I realize that we need to recognize first and foremost that we are to tell the truth of the gospel and that those, such as Arminians, who do not tell the truth of the gospel are liars. But for those of us who do tell the truth of the gospel, we need to constantly strive to tell the truth in every other area of our lives.

So whenever someone intentionally says something that is not true, he is speaking falsehood. We might say, "Well, I'm a very honest person. I would never intentionally mislead someone." But let me give you a couple instances in which many professing Christians intentionally speak falsehood.

This has really come to my attention as my children grow and understand more of what adults are saying. They can tell when people aren't speaking the truth and don't hesitate to say it. Here's an example: An adult and a child are looking up at the moon, and the adult says, "I wonder if the moon is made out of cheese." That may sound innocent enough on first listen, but listen to what the adult just said. Is it true that the adult wonders if the moon is made out of cheese? Further on in the conversation, the adult says that he knows that the moon is made out of rock and sand. The child can immediately tell that the adult really *wasn't* wondering what the moon was made

of. The adult had told a lie. Or when an adult tells a child who holds up a stuffed animal, “Ooh! I’m scared of that!” and when the child tells the adult that it is just a stuffed animal, the adult says, “Wshew! I’m glad you told me that. I thought he was real.” The adult lied. And you could probably think of many more situations similar to this, such as when an adult says something to a child that is not true, and when the child says, “That’s not true,” the adult says that he was just fooling. Well, the dictionary defines the noun “to fool” as “to deceive.” Maybe we’d think about it more if we knew we were saying, “I’m just deceiving you”!

Along the same lines is also something done in the name of fun, and that is to fool something for the sake of surprising him. I’m sure you’ve heard of a group of people planning a surprise party, and in order for the secret to be kept, many of the people have to lie to the person who’s going to be surprised. But the ends don’t justify the means. Just because it’s a surprise doesn’t give anyone the license to sin, and it is definitely sin to speak something to that person that is not true. Many practical jokes fit into this category, too.

We really need to think about this, because sometimes words come out that are natural to us, because we like to be funny or entertaining, and when we look back on it, we see that we were not telling the truth. It would be a good idea to hold each other to this kind of purity of speech. And we need to think, “Is what I’m about to say true, or is it speaking falsely?”

And lastly, a bit about purity of appearance. This one doesn’t go over too well even among those in Sovereign Grace circles, and many preachers wouldn’t touch this one with a ten-foot pole. The reason is that the professing church, and even some true Christians, have fallen deeply into sin on this issue, and it is not pleasant to expose these things. Also, when someone talks about appearance, he gets accused of being pharisaical or legalistic or a fundamentalist or something like that. But I want to show you that the Bible does talk about purity of appearance.

Why is appearance a crucial aspect of Christian living? Why should it really make any difference? A passage in the New Testament that deals most directly with this issue is 1 Timothy 2:9-10: “*So also the women to adorn themselves in proper clothing, with modesty and sensibleness, not with plaiting, or gold, or pearls, or expensive garments, but what becomes women professing fear of God, through good works.*” Since this passage is to women, I will be dealing with this issue mainly as it relates to women. This does not excuse men for dressing immodestly, but it is obvious that immodesty in women has been a great problem down through history, and we’ll go over some Old Testament passages to that effect a little later.

The LITV says that women are to be clothed “*with modesty and sensibleness.*” The KJV says “*with shamefacedness and sobriety.*” The word for shamefacedness is *aidos*, which gives the sense of looking down or having downcast eyes — and Strong’s Concordance says that it actually means bashfulness. The word for sobriety is *sophrosune*, which means self-control, moderateness, temperateness, discreetness. How much of today’s fashions for women fit into this category?

It is interesting how this sentence is constructed. Literally, it reads *“Likewise also the women in clothing decent, with modesty and sensibleness to adorn themselves, not with plaiting, or gold, or pearls, or garments expensive, but what becomes women professing fear of God, by means of works good.”* The modesty and sobriety, or shamefacedness and discreetness, are to be characteristics of what women wear.

Before we go further about modern fashion, let us look at a few passages in the Old Testament regarding this. Keep in mind that the Bible commands women to wear clothing that is in keeping with being shamefaced. Isaiah 3:16-24 says, *“And Jehovah says, Because the daughters of Zion are proud, and walk with stretched out necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing [as] they go, and make a tinkling with their feet; So Jehovah will make the crown of the daughter of Zion scabby; and Jehovah will lay their secret parts bare. In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of the ankle bracelets, and the headbands, and the crescents, the pendants, and the bracelets, and the veils; the turbans, and the leg ornaments, and the sashes, and the houses of the soul, and the amulets; the rings and nose jewels; the festal apparel and the outer garments; and the mantles, and the purses; the mirrors and the fine linen; and the turbans and the veils. And it shall be, instead of a smell of perfume, there shall be an odor of decay. And instead of a sash, a rope. And instead of well set hair, baldness. And instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth; burning instead of beauty.”* This is an example of the opposite of shamefaced appearance. According to the commentaries I read, “mincing” means short steps reflecting an air of haughtiness or seduction. And what I read about the phrase “seductive eyes” was very interesting. According to the sources that Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown cite, this could mean seductive looks, winking seductively, and even falsely setting off the eyes with paint. Face-painting is mentioned in Jeremiah 4:30: *“And you, O stripped one, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with crimson, through your adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, through you make large your eyes with paint, you beautify yourself in vain. Lovers despise you; they will seek your life.”* It is common knowledge that the women who painted their faces and ornamented themselves were the prostitutes. They did this to attract men. Proverbs 7:10-11 gives the description of a whore: *“And, behold, a woman to meet him, with a harlot’s dress, and a guarded heart; she [is] loud and stubborn; her feet do not rest in her own house.”* It is obvious from this passage that there was a certain manner of dress that was characteristic of whores. And finally in the Old Testament, a passage about discretion: Proverbs 11:22: *“[As] a ring of gold in a swine’s snout, [so is] a woman who is beautiful, yet turning aside discretion.”*

Now let’s go back to 1 Timothy 2:9. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown again helped me here. “Braided hair,” as the KJV puts it, is literally plaited hair, probably with the gold and pearls intertwined. JFB says, “Such gaud characterizes the spiritual harlot — Revelation 17:4.” So let’s look at Revelation 17:4: *“And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and being gilded with gold and precious stone and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominations and unclean things of her fornication.”*

What does this all mean for today? This is where we get into some touchy issues. For sure, Christian women must always ask themselves, “*WHY* am I doing this? Why am I wearing this?”

And not only that, but “WHY is this particular piece of clothing designed the way it is?” This would put much of what Christian women wear into the dumpster. Let me get even more specific than that with some questions and examples.

First — what is makeup for? Why do women wear makeup? Why is it that it is almost exclusively a female thing to do? I think you’ll find that it has its origins in prostitution and that it is used by females today for the same reason that it was and is used by prostitutes. It is to make the person more attractive to the opposite sex.

Second — what is jewelry for? Some jewelry, like a wedding band, is a symbol of commitment to a spouse. But what of other decorative jewelry? Well, it’s just that. It decorates. Much of the time, it is used to call attention to the face or other part of the body.

Third — what do most fashion designers have in mind when they design clothes for females? All you have to do is listen to one designer, and you’ve got them all. It is purposefully sexual. I cannot emphasize this enough. Almost all the clothes in the women’s clothing stores are to make the woman sexually attractive. Why do you think that there is a much higher prevalence of low-cut blouses, shirts, and dresses among women’s clothing than men’s? Why so many V-necks? Why do many women’s fashions try to bare something, whether it be a small part of the back or the front or the leg or even the shoulder? You can’t get around the fact that these things are designed the way they are because the designers have wicked things in mind. And the women of the church have bought into the world’s fashions and, in many cases, are dressed like whores. I found out another interesting fact a few years ago — do you know why high heels were ever designed in the first place? They were designed to make a woman walk in a certain way that is provocative! And another thing — can a woman wearing a modern swimsuit in public ever say that she is obeying 1 Timothy 2:9? Think about it. And how many women who are up on the stage for a beauty pageant would qualify for shamefacedness? It should be obvious to us that beauty pageants of any sort, whether or not there are swimsuits, are wicked.

We men also need to think about what we are wearing, for we can fall into the same trap that the women have fallen into. We, too, need to always ask WHY we are doing what we are doing.

So, how do we wrap this up? First, our thoughts need to be pure. We are sinning if we are even contemplating sin! Don’t believe the lie that finding someone sexually attractive outside of a committed lifelong relationship is not sin. And don’t even come close to situations that would fill your mind with sin. For example, if you know that a TV program often glorifies sin, then don’t even begin to watch it! If you know that a movie inevitably will glorify sin, then don’t even start watching it. This includes the so-called “children’s movies” such as the Disney animated movies in which the leading female characters are inevitably dressed like whores and in which wicked “romance” is promoted. It also includes things that do not have blatant immorality but have sexual innuendo and talk that is unbecoming to a Christian.

Second, we need to always think about what we’re saying. Is it truthful? Is it deceptive? We are

not to lie in order to be funny or to have fun. All of our talk must be totally truthful.

Third, we need to consider why we are wearing what we are wearing. For women in particular, that means getting rid of any clothing and other ornaments and extras that are designed to be sexually attractive or call attention to yourself. Cover yourselves! Be shamefaced! Walk as someone who is glorifying Christ. For men, is it wise to be seen in public with no shirt, or are you guilty of the same sin as women who wear provocative clothing?

Fourth, and I cannot stress this enough, we need to realize as Christians that we are *not* doing these things and pursuing personal purity out of any notion that these things are what save us or keep us saved or recommend us to God. If we think that, then we do not believe the gospel. On the same token, we show that we are not Christians if we have no concern for personal purity. Our concern for personal purity stems from our desire to be obedient to God out of love for Him.

Let us be diligent in these matters. Let us pray that God would give us a desire to pursue purity in everything we think, everything we say, and everything we wear.

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