

## A CHASTE VIRGIN

Brethren, the text we would like to consider together today is found in 2 Cor. 11:2. "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

A "**chaste virgin**", now that's redundancy for you. What other kind of a virgin is there? By definition, a virgin is chaste, otherwise she is no virgin at all. Yet Paul classifies the church a "chaste virgin." And Paul is a logician. Paul is not given to redundant expressions.

If we correctly understand the virginity to which Paul refers, the difficulty disappears. The thought is purity, spotlessness. Paul describes it well in Eph. 5:27, "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

But this condition of **virginal** holiness is not something that we are by nature. In fact, in 1 Cor. 6:11, after cataloging a horrible list of sins-including thievery, drunkenness, fornicators and the like--Paul adds, "and such were some of you." "But," he goes on, "ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God."

Dear brethren, it is this justification which makes us virgins; and it is the consequent washing and sanctifying that maintains this virginity. Thus when Paul speaks of us as "**virgins**", he is referring to our justified sinlessness or purity. And when he speaks of us as "**chaste virgins**", he is talking about the maintaining of that purity through washing and sanctification.

Our becoming virgins, therefore, is a historic event in our life. Our current responsibility is to hold that virginity in its native chastity. **Spiritual chastity is an absolute requirement for faithfulness.**

This chastity is further detailed in Rev. 14:4 where, speaking of the 144,000, John says, "these are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins." In Revelation, a book of symbols, it is easy to see that not literal women, but worldly churches, are what is being referred to. In other words, spiritual chastity is a separating from a worldly environment.

This same thought can be seen from the Greek word translated "chaste" in our theme text. The word is "**hagnos**", and comes from the same root as the word "**hagios**", the usual word for "holy." The thought of the word is "to separate, particularly for spiritual service."

How important it is, dear brethren, to separate ourselves, like Israel of old, from the "people of the land." But Israel found it difficult. It was frequently the cause of their backsliding into idolatry. And, brethren, I fear we, too, find it difficult at times to keep as separate from the world and its influences as we

should. When Paul wrote to Timothy in the third chapter of his second epistle about "perilous times" that would come in the last days, he was stressing the pressures that would come upon the church from world conditions at that time. And brethren, we are living at that time--and "perilous times" have come. Therefore it is more important **than ever** to separate ourselves, as a "chaste virgin" , unto our **one** husband, even Christ.

This failure to always discern the necessity for strict spiritual chastity is not unlike its natural counterpart, that chastity which we all realize should exist in both male and female, both consecrated and unconsecrated, until the day of their marriage vows.

Let us take a few moments and notice how the Scriptural reasons for observing natural chastity, which certainly we all should see and recognize, parallel the reasons for remaining spiritually chaste for our Heavenly Bridegroom.

The **first**, the most obvious, the most important reason for either natural or spiritual chastity is simple--because God commanded it. The Bible not only frequently condemns adultery, but fornication as well--thus condemning both pre-marital as well as extra-marital intimacies.

The world may well argue that the moralities of the past are hypocritical, that the physical expression of love is always a beautiful thing, that what happens between "consenting adults" is nobody's business, that premarital experiences help one make a more intelligent decision of a life mate -- but **one** fact alone makes a fallacy of all these rationalizations. **God condemns it.**

Think, for a moment, of the Garden of Eden. Really, what was so wrong in eating a piece of fruit. There was no third party to be hurt. Experimentation had led them to taste of all the other trees, What was so wrong--so wrong as to bring sin and death upon an entire race for over 6,000 years-in the simple act of eating a piece of fruit. Simply because **God said "No!."** As Gen. 3:6 states: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food ... pleasant to the eyes ... and desired to make one wise." But God had said, "**No!**" and that was the end of the matter.

And so with spiritual chastity. The Bible abounds in commands: "Go out from among her and touch no unclean thing" (Isa. 52:11); "Come out of her, my people" (Rev. 18:4); "separate yourselves from the people of the land" (Ezra 10:11) and on and on and on. No amount of rationalizing about the good to come from mixing with the world and their lives can overcome the simple dictate, **God commands separation.**

Too frequently, in the sexual mores of the world, we hear the expression "But everybody is doing it." Too frequently, in matters of the worldliness in the church, we hear, "But Brother So and So does such and such." The peer pressure of action is even greater than the peer pressure of words.

But this argument, which is so strong to our fallen flesh, is directly rebutted in Lev. 20:23. This particular chapter is a detailed catalog of sexually related sins and, in concluding this segment of the law, we find these words: "And **ye shall not walk** in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you; for they committed all these things, and **therefore** I abhorred them."

This point is well summarized in 1 Thess. 4:3, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication"--either natural or spiritual.

Our **second** point is closely related. It is a **hatred** of iniquity. In one of the Psalmist's descriptions of our Lord, picked up by the Apostle Paul, we find these words: "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest iniquity: **therefore** God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." (Psa. 45:7).

It is not enough for us to love righteousness. It is equally incumbent upon us that we hate iniquity if, for no other reason, than as a fortification of our defenses against sin.

When Jesus, in the sermon on the mount, in Matt. 5:28, said: "Whosoever looketh on a woman **to lust after her** hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"; he was not talking about the occasional appreciative glance that one may rest on another of the opposite sex. He was speaking of the mind being permitted to dwell upon the thought, to permit the glance to develop into sensual desire.

The old saying, though trite, is still true: "You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from building nests in your hair." The first glance is nothing more than a temptation thought; but in dwelling upon it, the temptation thought becomes a sin thought.

The fastest and most potent defense which the Christian has in this situation is to have previously developed a strong and healthy love for righteousness and an equally strong and healthy hatred for iniquity. Having defined God's will in a matter, it is not enough for us to merely acquiesce in doing that will, but, as in Psa. 40:8: "I delight to do thy will, O my God." Having defined the sin, we must not only refrain from it, but abhor the thought of it.

Whether it is a matter of lust, or in any of the countless temptations to worldliness that threaten our spiritual chastity, it is not sufficient to say, "I will refrain from the temptation; but O! how I wish the Lord would permit it." Rather it must be, "Recognizing that the Lord does not desire this for me, then I will strive to have no desire for it either."

If Agape, the highest form of love, is the love for good simply because it is good; then its counterpart is the hatred of that which is evil, simply on the principle that it is displeasing to our Heavenly Father.

Let's now proceed to our **third** point, the main reason for promiscuity, or lack of chastity--a worshipping of self rather than a worship of God.

In discussing the lack of sexual mores among the Gentiles, Paul, in the first chapter of Romans, lists three reasons for their degraded condition.

The first of these is found in verses 21 and 22, "Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not **as God**, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."

The key words here are not that they did not glorify God, but they didn't glorify him "**as God**." In other words, they did not recognize God's right to run their lives. In recent times, this same concept has re-surfaced under a new and more sophisticated name, "Existentialism", the concept that there is no absolute truth, that all truth is subjective to the facts of each individual's existence. How different, dear brethren, from the simple words of Prov. 1:7, "The fear of the Lord (the respect for his right to make commandment for our life, the recognition of his word as absolute truth) is the beginning of knowledge."

The second cause Paul notes in Romans 1, is in verse 25: "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, Who is blessed forever."

Whenever man (or woman) places their drives, their pleasures, above the dictates of God's word, we have a "worship of the creature" more than the Creator. Again the world has its retort ready--if God gave man hunger, in justice he must give him food; if God gave him sexual drives, he must give him the wherewithal to satisfy those drives. But, brethren he has, in the marriage bed, which Paul declares is "undefiled." It is only a matter of being willing to wait for God to satisfy in His time, instead of rushing to fill our desires in our own time.

This second problem is further strengthened if we take the word "Amen" at the end of verse 25 and translate it the way it is usually translated, "Verily," and put it at the beginning of verse 26. If this be true, then we have the statement about worshipping the creature more than the Creator followed by these words, "Verily, (that is, Of a truth), **for this cause** God gave them up until vile affections."

The third of Paul's reasons in Romans 1 is succinctly stated in verse 28, "Even as they **did not like** to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

Unfortunately, it is only too true with all of us, because of fallen human nature, that when our strong desires come into conflict with God's Word, especially when we see no **apparent** reason for his commands, that we, too, **do**

**not like** to retain God in our minds..

These same three reasons--(1) not accepting God's authority as lawgiver, (2) worshipping our own selves, the creature, more than the Creator; and (3) not liking to retain his commands that are averse to our desires--not only produce the promiscuity that so abounds in the world around us, but also is a threat of that worldliness which endangers our spiritual chastity.

"I can't spend all my time in religious affairs," the flesh cries out. "What's so wrong with going to a dance, or to a worldly party, or a weekend of skiing, or a little social drink, or any of the other of the dozens of lures which would turn us away from the path of complete consecration." Perhaps the answer cannot be said better than in the word of the angel at the open tomb to the disciples peering therein, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

For our **fourth** reason, let us go back to the origins of the race and note the reasons why God created male and female so differently and planned for their physical inter-reaction.

The fact that it is not strictly for pro-creation is manifest for two reasons. First, such reasoning would not only eliminate all concept of birth-control, but also all physical union after child-bearing years. Secondly, it would make the physical act strictly a biological function, divorcing it from the love relationship which we have all come to cherish in the marriage bonds.

The Scriptural reason for the re-union of male and female is beautifully stated in Gen. 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh."

Just a few verses earlier we note how, in creating woman, God took her from man's side, and here, as it were, they are symbolically once again reunited as one flesh.

But notice--both the physical separation and the physical union were of two people, not of a number of people. The Apostle Paul, in his beautiful sonnet on marriage, emphasizes this point in Eph. 5:30. There, just preceding the use of this text from Genesis, he speaks of our ideal relationship to Christ--"For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones."

Again, in our opening text, in 2 Cor. 11:2, Paul stresses his desire to "espouse you to one husband." Even in the best-intentioned of situations, where a boy and girl express their love in physical intimacy during their engagement period, the potential exists for their relationship to break off and be replaced with another.

In spiritual matters, too, this union with "**one** husband", and one only, should be a strong motivation to continued separation from the world. How we like the sing the hymn, "My goal is Christ, and Christ alone," but how difficult to follow throughout a life-long consecrated walk.

Our **fifth** reason is closely related--a simple word, **Commitment**. In the Old Testament there are a number of relationships described between male and female. In addition to marriage there was **bigamy** (as David with his many wives); **concubinage** (as Abraham and Solomon); **surrogacy** (as Hagar and the maids of Rachel and Leah); as well as **re-marriage** (Keturah and Abraham); **harlotry** (as Judah with his daughter-in-law); **rape** (Amnon and Tamar); **fornication** (the sons of Israel with the daughters of Moab); **adultery** (David and Bathsheba) and **Levirate law** (where a brother was to raise up seed to his sibling who died childless.)

Many of these--such as adultery, fornication and rape--were condemned and liable to the death penalty under the law. But others, such as concubinage, surrogacy and bigamy, were viewed permissively by God. Bigamy, at least, continued even into the early church. Paul's requirements that an **elder** "be the husband of one wife" would be meaningless otherwise, for there would be none others to choose from.

In one case at least, that of David and Bathsheba, God saw fit to bless the bigamous marriage over the first marriage of David (to Michal, daughter of King Saul) by continuing both the royal line (Solomon) and the ancestry of Jesus (Nathan) through it.

When we seek to determine what made one relationship permissible and another not, we see one difference--**commitment**. All of the relationships which God permitted for natural Israel--bigamy, concubines, surrogates and those under Levirate law--were in a contractual relationship. There was a commitment for life--for both emotional and temporal support.

In today's carefree society it is precisely this sense of commitment which is so lacking. True, on occasion, a couple feel that they have made such a commitment privately to each other; but experience has shown that this commitment has worn only too thin in too many cases over the passage of time.

If there is such a willingness to make a commitment without marriage, why is there such a hesitancy to express this commitment **by** marriage. Again the retort is quick--marriages, even Bible Student marriages, have too frequently shown that even marriage commitments are not permanent. We are living in the age of divorce, and permissive laws allow marriage ties to be easily severed. But, dear brethren, I suggest that two wrongs do make a right, and that the free and easy divorce we see around us is indeed a great wrong. Jesus' comments in Matt. 19:1-12 are very explicit on the subject.

In spiritual chastity, too, the issue of **commitment** is a strong reason for holiness and separation from the world. As Paul noted in Rom. 6:16, "Know ye

not, that to whom he yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom he obey." Again, "no man can serve two masters" (Luke 16:13.)

Without doubt, the world has many fine avenues of activity, many well deserving of involvement. They are not only fine, they are so fine as to deserve **commitment** on the part of those who serve them. And this commitment cannot be given in two directions, or we will be torn by the conflict.

Rather, for us, dear brethren, let us follow the advice of Rom. 12:6-8, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."

The sixth point we would like to touch is the effect of our actions upon others. Contrary to Cain's denial, we are "our brother's keeper." In the 14th chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul expounds at length about the danger of stumbling our brethren. And, lest it be thought that he was confining his thoughts to the eating of meat offered to idols, he adds in verse 21, that it is not good to do "**anything** whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."

When, in 15:1 he says, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves", he is giving the sum of the whole matter. If we consider our consciences strong because they permit us to do some act, it may still be wise to forego that act because of the weaker consciences of others. The danger of committing an action which we do not consider a sin which encourages another to do the same in violation of his conscience, is a danger which cannot be over-emphasized.

In concluding a similar discussion in 1 Cor. 10:31, his summary is: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, **or whatsoever ye do**, do all to the glory of God." Brethren, really, can **any** action which weakens either the natural or spiritual chastity of the Christian be to the glory of God? I think not!

But this danger is farther than that of stumbling. Because we claim to be Christians in a non-Christian world, because we **do claim** to have standards in contradistinction to the world around us, we live, as it were, in a fishbowl.

Again it is Paul who speaks of this when, in 2 Cor. 3:2, he says of the church in Corinth, "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and **read of all men.**" It is with this in mind that he continues, in chapter 6, verse 3, with the admonition: "Giving no offence in anything, **that the ministry be not blamed.**"

My dear brethren, let none of us think that the ministry here is that of the

elders. We all are ministers of God. "anointed," as the Scripture says, "to preach good tidings unto the meek." The ministry here is not the ministry of the pulpit, but the "ministry of reconciliation" committed unto every child of God. But even those passages that do refer to eldership, such as 1 Tim. 3:7, where a qualification for this office is to "have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" are wise counsels for all.

Summarizing this point, then, it is the responsibility of each of us to uphold the reputation of both the Gospel and the Church which ministers to it. If those who aspire to natural royalty must be circumspect in all of their life's affairs, even in the choice of a marriage partner; how much more we, who seek to reign with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Our time is rapidly drawing to a close, and we have only had time to deal with some six aspects of our subject. Time fails us to consider the many additional dangers that lie in the path of either natural or spiritual infidelity.

If time permitted we might talk of the **guilt** which invariably is the cost for any infraction of conscience. Rom. 2:14,15. Or we might speak of the **unnaturalness** of such acts as cited in Rom. 1:26. Or we might consider the innate **selfishness** that prompts such actions. Or, yet again, of the danger of **living for the present** instead of for eternity.

Perhaps one of the best defenses we can raise is to personally read and absorb the principles set forth in those oft-read words of "A Vow Unto the Lord." In recent years this vow has fallen into disrespect as archaic, dated and insensitive. Perhaps this has come through its over-use which can make it seem ritualistic and as much a mantra as the Hail Mary's and Our Father's of Catholicism.

But the principles, dear brethren--the principles of the Vow--are eternal and well worthy of etching in our mind. First, as the equally oft-repeated Lord's prayer, it emphasizes the holiness of God. Second, it calls attention to our prayer responsibilities for the entire harvest work. Third it pledges careful scrutiny of our daily life and motives. Fourth, while singling out Spiritism and Occultism, it carries a commitment to separate from ever snare of the Adversary. And finally, realizing the strength of sexual temptation as well as the proneness of others to make the most of evil appearances, promises great circumspection in our dealings with those of the opposite sex.

In conclusion, let us turn quickly, but meaningfully, to the words of Rom. 12:2, "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed **by** the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."