

Fighting Sexual Temptation

A little imagination can steer us away from insidious sin. **by Dr. Charles M. Stone, Jr.**



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“If you were on an island with 13 sultry singles, would you be tempted?” Over 64,000 people responded to this reality show Web survey with these results: 45 percent - definitely; 16 percent - definitely not; 39 percent - well, you never know.

Another show on the same TV network promoted itself with “Follow a group of eleven single men and women who are given the opportunity of a lifetime — to live together in the most exclusive resort ever created.” Each episode focuses on a modern-day adaptation of musical chairs: musical bedrooms. In this version, the singles decide who they will sleep with each night.

These two reality shows represent the emerging cultural attitude toward sex: It’s fun and OK as long as it’s “safe” — nobody gets hurt and two consenting

adults agree to it. Sensuality has become central. Dallas Willard aptly described our culture when he wrote, “The drive to self-gratification opens up into a life without boundaries, where nothing is forbidden — if one can get away with it. ‘Why’ is replaced with ‘Why not?’” (*Renovation of the Soul*).

Because God created our bodies and sex, He has the right to determine sexual boundaries. His manual, the Bible, clearly states those boundaries: He limits sexual expression to marriage. Since we can’t avoid these counter-biblical attitudes in our culture, how can we protect ourselves from their influence? How do we keep sexually pure in an age of boundary-less sex? How do we “flee sexual immorality,” as the Bible exhorts?

The apostle Paul gives sound advice in 1 Corinthians 6 when

he describes four images of a believer’s body that require our imagination. Permissive sexual views in Corinth challenged the believers at that time. Because many came from sexually immoral backgrounds, they faced the temptation to fall back into their former lifestyles. That problem, and others as well, prompted Paul to write 1 Corinthians. He paints vivid images in chapter 6, explaining why God limits sex to marriage. When we use our imagination to visualize these body images, they become powerful tools in fighting against sexual temptation. They help strengthen the sexual boundaries God established.

Christ’s body

The first concept is to visualize your body as part of Christ’s body. Paul poses this question in 1 Corinthians 6:15: “Do you not

know that your bodies are members of Christ?” His question figuratively describes our bodies as parts of Christ’s body. Paul doesn’t imply that we are divine, but with this image he states that we represent Christ in a physical way to the world.

Our culture values the human body. We believe it’s important to take care of and protect from harm or abuse. Because society values the body, human services agencies will remove a child from physically or sexually abusive situations.

Similarly, such a belief can motivate us to keep our bodies sexually pure, since we are an extension of Christ’s body. Eugene Peterson paraphrased verse 15 when he wrote in *The Message*, “You wouldn’t take the Master’s body off to a whorehouse, would you?”

It’s unthinkable to imagine Christ’s body used in a sexually immoral way. Therefore, because our bodies are a part of Christ’s body, Paul states that sex outside of His boundaries misuses the body of Christ.

When sexual temptation confronts us, an image of sexually misusing Christ’s body can help us resist.

A sacred place

Second, visualize your body as a sacred place. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul parallels a believer’s body to a physical temple when he writes that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Because we respect a physical temple (a church) as a holy place, we expect that only holy and sacred activities would occur there. Likewise, because a believer’s body is the temple of

the Holy Spirit, it makes sense that we would use our bodies only in holy ways.

In Paul’s letter to his protégé, Timothy, he elaborates on this theme:

In a well-furnished kitchen there are not only crystal goblets and silver platters, but waste cans and compost buckets — some containers used to serve fine meals, others to take out the garbage. Become the kind of container God can use to present any and every kind of gift to his guests for their blessing (2 Timothy 2:20, 21, *The Message*).

We received a beautiful silver serving tray for a wedding present years ago. My wife keeps it in a safe place in one of our kitchen cabinets. She uses that platter for special occasions. We reserve the expensive platter only for the best.

On the other hand, we have a cheap plastic trash can we keep under the kitchen sink and throw moldy leftovers and garbage into it. I don’t care what I put in the

trash can, because I don’t value it much. However, I would never put garbage on our silver platter.

Because Paul describes our bodies as temples of His Spirit, crystal goblets, and silver platters, using our bodies in sexually immoral ways implies we put trash into the place where the Holy Spirit lives.

Sexual immorality defiles that sacred place. We should treat our bodies in holy ways. Sex outside marriage treats them as I would our silver platter were I to toss smelly chicken bones on it. The next time you feel sexually tempted, bring to your mind an image of a silver platter with stinky garbage on it. Remind yourself that were you to give in to that temptation, you would do something similar to the holy place where God’s Spirit dwells.

God’s property

Third, visualize your body as God’s property. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul states, “You are not your own,” implying that God actually owns your body.

Shoring Up Your Defenses Against Sexual Temptation

1. Put a porn filter on your e-mail.
2. Block cable TV channels that regularly feature sexually explicit shows.
3. Never flirt with someone who’s not your spouse.
4. If married, avoid emotional intimacy with someone of the opposite sex who isn’t your spouse.
5. Don’t assume you’re immune to sexual temptation.
6. Find same-sex accountability partners who can ask how you’re dealing with temptation.

— Dr. Charles M. Stone, Jr.

I'm embarrassed to say that a pitchfork I borrowed from a friend ten years ago still sits in my tool shed in the back yard. I always take care of things I borrow and always return them (well, almost). Common courtesy motivates most of us to take care of things others have loaned us, since they don't belong to us.

Paul teaches that God gave us our bodies as "loaners." They belong to Him, not to us. He entrusts us with them for safe-keeping and expects us to use them in ways that respect His ownership. Owners rightfully set the rules for the use of their property. Because God owns our bodies, He has the right to limit sexual expression to marriage. When believers have sex outside of marriage, they don't respect God's property.

Think of the last item you borrowed from a friend or neighbor. Remember the attention you paid to its care. Let that thought remind you of God's ownership of your body the next time you feel tempted to sexually misuse it.

Priceless treasure

The fourth concept is to visualize your body as a priceless treasure. Scripture states that we were "bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Although scientists have determined the value of minerals and metals in a human body to be about \$32, the price tag God places on us is beyond comparison. He valued us so much that He paid the price of His own Son, as 1 Peter 1:18, 19 tells us: "The ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the

sinless, spotless Lamb of God" (NLT).

What we treasure, we take care of. I love good food, so I value taking care of my teeth, because good oral hygiene allows me to enjoy eating. So I brush and floss; I don't use a toilet bowl brush on my teeth. What we value, we guard, protect, and wisely use.

Because God paid a huge price for us, He expects us to honor Him with our bodies. How a believer uses his body reveals the value he places on it. If he esteems it as God does, he will stay sexually pure. If he uses his body in a sexually dishonoring way, his actions reveal little regard for God's value of his body.

Imagine the most priceless possession you own. Think about how you take care of and protect it. Now imagine your body as one of those priceless possessions. The next time you feel sexually tempted, remember to value your body as highly as God does. Let that image motivate you to resist this temptation.

You may not find yourself on an island with 13 sultry singles. Few people will. But the normal course of life brings plates full of sexual delicacies outside of marriage that Satan would love you to sample. When those delicacies entice you to cross God's sexual boundaries, visualize these images of your body. Your sanctified imagination can become a powerful weapon against the lure of forbidden sex.

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