

11. Ethics and Morality for the 21st Century as Taught by Christ and the Apostles

The Ethics and Morality of Jesus for the 21st Century was a companion study, composed of 13 lessons. If you wish to find these lessons in detail, you may find them at the Gospel Lessons web site: <http://www.gospellessons.info> . In this present set of lessons, which compare the doctrinal teachings of Jesus and the apostles to the present day sectarian and denominational teachings, one can not overlook the moral and ethical departures of the 21st century from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. A single question summarizes the direction this lesson takes: how can professed followers of Christ so blatantly ignore his teaching on the central moral issues of our time? Three issues illustrate how and why 21st century folks depart from the New Testament teaching. These issues are adultery and unlawful divorce, permissive sex, and homosexuality. Jesus and the apostles taught that sex outside the marriage contract is sin. It is sin for the teenager tempted as rising hormones produce new and enticing feelings. It is sin for single men and women to lead a modern life style, which permits casual or even committed sex outside of marriage. It is a sin for professed homosexuals to cave to unlawful desires, blaming God for their misdeeds.

What Jesus and the Apostles Taught about Adultery and Unlawful Divorce

It is sin for husbands and wives to fool around promiscuously and divorce for causes other than adultery. Adultery is a word that describes unfaithful sexual immorality when the participants are married. The definition includes those with an unscriptural divorce and remarriage or those married participating in illicit unlawful sex. Jesus and the apostles taught emphatically that these are sins of equal and condemning nature. Here is what Jesus and the apostles taught.

In Matt 5:27-28, while delivering the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

“27 You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

To this mental prohibition, Jesus added prohibition against the physical act when it includes married and divorced people in Matt 5:32:

“32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

In Mark 10:11-12, Jesus includes both men and women:

11 He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

The exception given here to the rule of divorce is marital unfaithfulness. The exception appears again in Matt 19:9:

“9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul wrote in 1 Cor 6:9-10:

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be

deceived: Neither the **sexually immoral** nor idolaters nor **adulterers** nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

In the 21st century, illicit sex among married people abounds, receiving tacit approval in most cases and a blind eye in others. The courts now generally approve of divorces for grounds other than sexual unfaithfulness. Flirtations and even the consummation of sex acts are common in the 21st century work places, social circles, and even within families. The mores and ethics of the modern society have rejected the 1st century teaching of Jesus and the apostles.

What Jesus and the Apostles Taught about Permissive Sex

1 Cor 6:9-10, cited above, separates sexual immorality and adultery. The next two points will cover two types of sexual immorality: permissive sex and homosexuality, although both by definition are sexual immorality. Permissive sex best describes the 21st century view that teenagers can make out, that adult singles can have full-blown sexual encounters outside marriage, and that adults may have live-in partners and enjoy sex without the benefit of marriage. All of these acts of permissive sex have the general approval of the media and of the national culture. However, the 1st century teaching of Jesus and the apostles condemned them with strong language, teaching that those who practice sexual immorality cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. Jesus set the high standard for sexual conduct in Matt 5:27-28. While delivering the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

“27 You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

We are not even to look upon another to lust after them. To this eternal principle, the apostles added specific commands prohibiting sexual immorality. Paul included sexually immoral, adulterers, male prostitutes and homosexual offenders among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. In 1 Cor 6:9-11, he taught:

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

In 1 Cor 6:13-18, he followed up by teaching how sexual immorality is so spiritually devastating:

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." 17 But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

Sexual immorality separates us from Christ and defiles the body created when we joined our bodies to Christ. Such a sin becomes the very essence of the works of the flesh. In Gal 5:19-21, Paul taught:

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: **sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery**; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Once again, heaven is at stake when we commit sexual immorality. Therefore, Rev 21:8 includes the sexually immoral as those with a place in the fiery lake of burning brimstone:

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

For those of us who are God's holy people, there should not even be a hint of sexual immorality, according to Eph 5:3-5:

3 But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 4 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

What Jesus and the Apostles Taught about Homosexuality

In the 21st century, society has come to look upon homosexuality as a genetic disposition out of the control of the individual so tempted to sin. Some homosexuals even say that God made them that way. One who takes the New Testament point of view will to be called *homophobic*. Homosexuality receives the approval of most of the entertainment media, the political establishment, and the *enlightened* public. Yet, homosexuality is a succumbing to the lust of the flesh, just as a single person might or just as a teenager on the couch might or the husband on a business trip might or just as a bored and neglected housewife might. All these would be sexually immoral and powerfully tempted by the devil to pursue their lusts. The homosexual has no special excuse for the sin. Of homosexuals, Jude uses the expression *gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion*. In Jude 7, he wrote:

7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

The sin of Sodom was the sin of homosexuality. (See Gen 13).

Paul was so emphatic in his teaching that one cannot ignore it. He taught in Rom 1:24-27:

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

In 1 Cor 6:9-10, Paul wrote:

“9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be

deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Conclusion

The ethics and morality of Jesus are unchanged over the centuries. Men and women today must accept the moral principles as Jesus and the apostles taught them. Neither time, nor situations, nor genetic inclinations can change what Jesus taught. Certain acts may be legal, and one’s civil right allows the committing of the sin; but it remains unscriptural and a moral wrong to commit that very same sin. Let us not be confused in the present world, seeking temporal pleasure and satisfaction. We wish to inherit the kingdom of God.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Matt 5:27-28: When does one commit adultery in the heart?
2. Matt 5:32: By what exception may one divorce his wife? What is one’s condition if they marry a divorced woman?
3. Mark 10:11-12: How are the rules of adultery the same for men and women?
4. Matt 19:9: What is the single reason for divorce and remarriage?
5. 1 Cor 6:9-10: Will sexually immoral and adulterers inherit the kingdom of God?
6. Matt 5:27-28. What high standard of sexual morality did Jesus set?
7. 1 Cor 6:9-11: What sexual offenses did Paul include under the category – wicked?
8. 1 Cor 6:13-18: For what are our bodies meant? Of whom are our bodies members? How can one unite the body of Christ to a prostitute? What are we to flee? What sin is against a person’s own body?
9. Gal 5:19-21: What are the sexual acts of a sinful nature? Who will not inherit the kingdom of God?
10. Rev 21:8: Where is the place for the sexually immoral?
11. Eph 5:3-5: What among the children of God must there be no hint?
12. Jude 7: Up to what did Sodom and Gomorrah give themselves?
13. Gen 13: What was their specific perversion?
14. Rom 1:24-27: Over to what sinful lusts did God give men and woman?
15. 1 Cor 6:9-10: What will be the fate of male prostitutes and homosexual offenders?