

# Sound in the Faith

by Bob Pulliam

## Lesson 4

### The Morally Sound Life



Memory Verses: John 8:31; II Timothy 2:15 (KJV); Ephesians 1:22f

**A**s we have already noted in previous lessons, it is vitally important that we abide by the law of Christ. That law doesn't just dictate what we may, and may not, do religiously. It lays out the kind of life that is pure, or morally sound. Many people look at scripture as hindering their ability to be happy, by forbidding certain behavior. It never seems to occur to these people that what is forbidden may be truly harmful, and opposed to the needed purity of a child of God.

When you were a child, I'm sure you can remember your parents forbidding behavior you wanted to engage in. Everyone else was doing it; but your parents wouldn't allow it. As you look back, you can better see their desire to protect you. While children tend to think that their parents are trying to ruin their lives, it is actually quite the opposite. Earthly parents may make mistakes in this regard; but we still know that they do what they do for their children's benefit.

God never makes mistakes, however. We, as His children, can expect the concern He shows to be of a significant nature. We know that He isn't just forbidding behavior to make us miserable. It is for our well-being, and that we be a holy people.

It isn't uncommon for the worldly to think of Christians as a "holier-than-thou" type of people. They will poke fun at us, and even become angry with us. While it is possible for us to hold up our service to God as a taunt to the world; they will still ostracize us when we do not. The fact that we disapprove of their actions angers them. Many religious people through the centuries have suffered persecution because of this reaction. It is to be expected by the disciple who follows Jesus. Jesus said to the apostles: *"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* (Jn 15:18f) While this was spoken

specifically to the apostles, it still holds a certain degree of truth for application to others who follow Jesus. John wrote, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” (I Jn 3:1).

The disciples of Jesus weren’t just hated for the doctrines they taught. The Romans hated their very purity, and piety. They considered Christians to be fanatics, overly zealous in matters of morality. We will find times when we are treated as fanatics and kooks. This is when our faith will truly begin to be tested.

### *Worldliness...*

We sometimes walk a difficult line between worldliness and godliness. We cannot live outside of this world, and yet we cannot be lovers of this world. John said, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” (I Jn 2:15) John isn’t saying we can’t appreciate the beauty of God’s creation, and the blessings He pours out upon us. He goes on to tell his readers what he meant by the word “world”... “For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world.” (I Jn 2:16) He lists three categories that sum up any and all sin found in the world. The lust of the flesh is the carnal appetites excited by the body. The lust of the eye appeals through the sense of sight, drawing the mind into it’s trap. And the pride of life appeals to the vanity for attention, power and glory. Sin appeals to us through these mediums, and we must be careful not to give them their ways.

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### ***Question Set Number One***

- 1) What is it vitally important that we do?
- 2) What does the law lay out?
- 3) How do many people look at scripture?
- 4) Many times, the worldly think of Christians as what?
- 5) What angers them?
- 6) Who did the world hate before it ever hated any disciple?
- 7) Because we are children of God, the world does not \_\_\_\_\_ .

- 8) What did the Romans hate about Christians?
  - 9) What did John tell his readers not to love?
  - 10) What three categories does John list for the “things of the world”?
    - a)
    - b)
    - c)
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### *The “Harmless” Pastime...*

Let’s begin our study of specific sins, by talking about an activity that has been called a “harmless pastime”. Pornography is practiced on one’s own time, and involves no one but yourself - or so it would seem. The truth is, it is an addictive pastime that has very profound effects on a person’s life.

When one begins this activity, it seems easy to get enough to satisfy the desire. But soon, you will realize that it takes more to get enough. It may begin with “soft porn”, which involves simple portraits of an indecent nature. But then the appetite is whetted for “harder” porn, which portrays acts and more erotic situations. Time will be consumed in greater and greater quantity. Time you could be spending with your family, friends, neighbors. Time you could be using to study God’s word, prepare yourself to teach, or actually sit down with someone to share Jesus and the church.

But this isn’t just a question of wasted time. Jesus said, *“But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Mt 5:28) We are talking about engaging in sin. And if the sin within the heart isn’t reprehensible enough, don’t forget what happens to the information you plant in your brain. It germinates within, and gives rise to fulfillment of the fantasy. Jesus also said, *“from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”* (Mk 7:21-23) Paul told Timothy to *“flee youthful lusts”* (II Tim 2:22). And he told the Corinthians to *“Flee sexual immorality”*. (I Cor 6:18) The Bible is not silent on this, as some would imagine. And it warns of this for good reason.

As stated above, this is addictive behavior. If you are already trapped in this viscous addiction; do not allow it to go untreated. If you cannot stop yourself, then get professional help!

## *Being a Careful Soldier of the Cross...*

Before we get too far from the subject of sexual immorality, we need to talk about staying out of dangerous circumstances.

If you were a soldier in a war zone, you would probably be very careful about where you went. You would keep your eyes peeled for danger, and try to avoid circumstances where you might compromise your ability to fight.

But the truth is, we *are* soldiers in a war zone. Paul told the Ephesians to, “*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*” (Eph 6:11) Peter told his readers that fleshly lusts “*war against the soul*” (I Pt 2:11). Paul told the Corinthians that we do not war according to the flesh (with swords and spears). Instead, our warfare is spiritual in nature (II Cor 10:3f). When he wrote to the Ephesians about putting on the armor of God, Paul enumerated the items that they were to wear (Eph 6:14-17). In this list, he called the word of God “*the sword of the Spirit*” (v17).

Many an act of immorality has been born of the innocent circumstance. Men and women allowing themselves to be alone together is dangerous. Helping each other in these circumstances, where physical contact occurs, can bring disastrous results.

Your reputation may also be at stake. Even though nothing takes place, if someone sees the situation, and begins to gossip about it, you may find people preferring to believe the rumor, rather than the truth. Such stories can be devastating. And waiting until the story has been spread is too late for damage control. The only way to fight the destruction of your reputation is to avoid circumstances where people might talk. Never find yourself alone with a person of the opposite sex. Have your spouse with you, or someone else that you trust.

## *The Way We Talk About God...*

Our language says much about us. This is true of education, our home (accent), but most importantly it shows our morals and attitude toward God.

Let’s talk about our attitude toward God. Using the name of God in vain is very common place. It is not unique to our time. God commanded the Israelites, “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*” (Ex 20:7) Examples of taking the name of God in vain would be, “Oh my God!”, “God Almighty!”, or just the simple exclamation, “God!”. These are so commonplace, that people use them without thinking about what

they are saying. When you speak of God without any purpose other than expressing surprise or disgust, you are taking His name in vain. We must also remember that the name of Jesus is holy, and must not be taken in vain. Crying out, “Oh Jesus!”; “Jesus Christ!”; “Oh, Lord!”; etc... are an empty use of the name of our savior. The scriptures also use the word “*profane*” in discussing the use of what is holy in a common way.

These reflect an attitude of disregard for the person whose name is being thrown about. I realize that some people who use these terms do not mean them to be disrespectful; but they are. Many years ago, I had a man say “Oh God!” in my presence. I asked him not to take the name of God in vain, and he told me he was praying. I told him that if he could find a two-worded prayer in scripture that consisted only of those words, he could continue to say it in my presence. Of course, he could not. The truth is, if this is not a case of taking the name of the Lord in vain, then it is impossible to do so. If it is impossible to do so, then God commanded Israel not to do something that was already impossible for them to do.

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### *Question Set Number Two*

- 1) What is pornography sometimes called?
- 2) The truth is, it is what kind of pastime?
- 3) What will be consumed in greater and greater quantity?
- 4) What has one done when he has lusted after a woman?
  
- 5) What happens to this kind of information when planted in the heart?
  
- 6) What did Paul tell Timothy to do?
- 7) What did he tell the Corinthians to do?
- 8) What did Paul tell the Ephesians to ‘put on’?
- 9) What did Peter say that fleshly lusts do?
- 10) What did Paul call the word of God?
- 11) What may be at stake, when we allow questionable circumstances?
  
- 12) In speech, what did Moses forbid among the Israelites?
  
- 13) The scriptures also use what word for this?
- 13) What attitude is reflected by profaning the Lord’s name?

## *Vulgar Language...*

Another problem that arises with speech, is the use of vulgar language. Vulgar language is language that is crude, base, or foul. It may involve the mention of parts of anatomy that should not be discussed outside of a medical context (some of which are substituted for common words, and should never be used). It may involve bodily functions, or crude terms for sexual acts. Just the fact that these are terms for things that are either covered, or done in private, ought to tell us that they shouldn't be spoken of openly.

Paul told the Ephesians, *“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”* (Eph 5:3f) It is interesting that he mentioned sins like fornication and covetousness with the language we use. This is how important it is that be careful how we speak.

A cross between the profane and the vulgar are condemnations that call down judgment on others. These would include saying: “go to hell”; “damn you”; or other combinations including these. Hell and God's damnation are reserved for His use in judgment. We profane these, when we speak like we have power over them. And the fact that we are condemning others to hell is a vulgar, or base, attitude toward our fellow man.

Language is very much taken for granted by all of us. We use words that we don't pay much attention to. Sometimes we use words we don't know the definitions for, thinking they are safe, or acceptable. A common pitfall in people's speech is the use of euphemisms. A euphemism is a word that means the same as a bad word, but is substituted because it does not sound as bad. The word “darn”, for example, has no other meaning than “damn”. “Gosh”, and “golly” mean “God”. “Gee”, and “Jeeze”, mean “Jesus”. These euphemisms have no other definition. I realize that there is a lot of euphemistic speech in the world, but it would be wise for us not to use these when they can mean nothing other than what we are avoiding. It would be like speaking a foreign language, and cursing in that language. We may not have uttered the English word, but we said it, all the same.

## *Proper Attire...*

There is no “dress code”. Nothing in the Bible says that the hem line must be at such-and-such level. But the scriptures do address the subject of attire. At times, you will hear people quibble about the clothing that can be worn, because they do not like being restricted in their wardrobe. But

how we look in public is of importance. Paul wrote *“that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”* (I Tim 2:9f) Here the emphasis is on adorning oneself with too much, for a show. That can be a problem today, but more often than not, it is a problem of not wearing enough. We expose the form and the flesh with no thought to how it is affecting others. But why should that concern us?...

Jesus said, *“that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Mt 5:28) We discussed this passage on page twenty-seven, concerning the subject of pornography. But a person does not have to be naked to cause someone to lust for them. One need only listen to what the fashion designers say, and what the songs on the radio sing, to understand the profound effect of skimpy, or form fitting attire. Are we without guilt, if we are causing others to sin by our unconcern for their weakness? Jesus also said, *“whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”* (Mt 18:6f) Maybe they will lust after someone else, if we aren't provoking them; but that doesn't excuse us. Jesus said that the offenses will come, but *“woe to that man by whom the offense comes”* (v7).

So what will cause others to lust? Thighs, cleavage, bare shoulders, bare midriff, ... we know what turns people on. “But what if I don't have the kind of body someone would lust after?” I hear this question quite often. We still shouldn't assume we won't provoke lust in someone. There are all kinds of tastes out there, and we need to stop trying to look like the rest of the world.

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### ***Question Set Number Three***

- 1) What is vulgar language?
- 2) What other sins did Paul mention with vulgar language?
- 3) What is a common pitfall in people's speech?
- 4) Women were to adorn themselves in \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5) How has one sinned in lusting after a woman?
- 6) What would be better than to cause someone to stumble?

## *The Christian and Alcohol...*

An entire lesson could be dedicated to this subject. Many of the things discussed in this lesson will have become customary to many students before coming to the Lord. Having engaged in them for so long, one might wonder, “What’s the harm?” But it is important that we not look back to justify our practices. We must allow the scriptures, and principles of righteousness, to guide us.

Most are aware of the fact that the Bible condemns drunkenness, so we will not dwell on that. Does the Bible condone the use of alcohol as a beverage of choice? This immediately prompts some to appeal to the wines of the Bible. And the classic argument is that Jesus made the water into wine for the wedding guests to drink.

But wines in the Bible were not always fermented. The Bible word for “wine” itself does not indicate whether or not alcohol is present. It simply refers to the juice expressed from the grape, and fermentation is not a consideration. To say that Jesus made fermented wine for a bunch of wedding guests who had already drunk freely (Jn 2:10), is to attribute to Him the role of being an accessory to their drunkenness.

Paul makes an interesting use of the word “sober”, which meant “*to be free from the influence of intoxicants*”<sup>1</sup> He wrote, “*Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.*” (I Th 5:6f). Some do not like this, and explain by pointing out that Paul is just using “sober” as a metaphor for watching. But notice that it is Paul who includes the idea of getting drunk. It must be included in what Paul is discussing, since he brings it up! The only safe course is for us to abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages. They are known as the mark of worldly sophistication, and we should not associate ourselves with such.

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### ***Question Set Number Four***

- 1) The Bible condemns \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 2) What did Jesus do, that people use to justify drinking?
  - 3) “Sober” means -
  - 4) Drinking alcohol is known as...
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<sup>1</sup> W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1985) p583