

SESSION 1

MAXED OUT

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

10 Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. 12 For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. 13 This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. 14 Stand, therefore, with truth like a belt around your waist, righteousness like armor on your chest, 15 and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace. 16 In every situation take the shield of faith, and with it you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word. 18 Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

WELCOME

We live in a culture where purity is rarely talked about. Our culture would rather talk about how to avoid the consequences of impurity (i.e. birth control and safe sex). No one talks about the sacredness of marriage and the concept of saving sex for marriage is almost laughable to many today. Our culture simply doesn't believe in purity.

Our churches, however, aren't always that much better as they often make the opposite mistake of fixating on not having sex as the one and only aspect of purity that matters. When we look at Scripture we see that while God calls us all to save sex for the covenant of marriage, there are many other equally important aspects of purity. Throughout this study we will discuss several of these key aspects. In so doing, our prayer is that you will develop a holistic understanding of purity as you seek to live for Christ and His kingdom.

▶ PRESS PLAY

Watch the Session 1 video as a group, then discuss the following questions.

DISCUSS

Consider the following questions as a group.

What are some of our culture's prevailing attitudes about purity? How does our culture define purity?

How does the Bible define purity? What are the key attributes of a pure life?

To be pure means to be morally clean—to be free from sin. It involves more than merely avoiding sinful decisions like having sex before marriage. In order to be pure or clean in God's sight, both our attitudes and our actions must be submitted completely to God (Ps. 24:3-4). Purity is a posture, a way of life that flows out of a relationship with God.

While none of us are pure (Rom. 3:9-11), we serve a God who offers to cleanse us from all our sins through faith in His Son (1 John 1:9; 1 Pet. 3:18). Once you trust Jesus as Lord of your life, the pursuit of purity begins. As we genuinely seek to know and follow Christ, He begins to open our eyes to what it means to be pure. In this study we will see that to pursue Christ is to grow in purity. This requires the development of seven key virtues: identity, redemption, love, humility, self-sacrifice, endurance, and biblical manhood.

CULTURE

Have you ever played a video game that allowed you to create your own character and adjust his attributes? What attributes did you max out? Why?

What attributes does our culture encourage us to max out as young men if we want to be happy or successful?

Our culture is constantly telling young men that the key to happiness and success is to be athletic, popular, attractive, and influential. Our culture tells young men to look, act, and dress a certain way if they want to make it.

What are the attributes we must max out if we hope to live a life of holiness?

I have defined seven attributes or virtues that are essential to living a holy life. We will look at both the world and the Bible's definitions of the following virtues: identity, redemption, love, humility, self-sacrifice, endurance, and biblical manhood. We will look at how our culture defines each of these attributes and then contrast that with what the Bible has to say. According to Ephesians 2:1-3, we live in a broken world—a culture has been utterly wrecked by sin. If we look to the culture to help us understand love and purity, we will find ourselves wrecked as well. We must let the Scriptures which are inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17) speak if we hope to find our bearings on love and purity.

In each session, the above virtues will be unpacked, taking into consideration the secular worldview, Scripture, and sometimes the legalism that has infiltrated the church. For example, in dealing with the area of sexual purity as it relates to abstinence from sex until marriage, I have witnessed some who held to a radical pursuit of purity prior to marriage and then they fell into adultery later on in marriage.

They never dealt with the pride in their hearts that took shape in the form of legalism. While these young people had a genuine heart to please God and save sex for marriage, their commitment to virginity took priority over their desire for God Himself. They were pursuing the appearance of purity when they should have been pursuing Jesus. As a result, they began to drift. Eventually they found themselves unable to live up to their own standards—they had made virginity into an idol. Sexual temptation can only be conquered by a holistic biblical understanding of purity.

CHRIST

The world is constantly telling us to seek pleasure at any cost. Our culture constantly barrages us with this philosophy through entertainment, social media, and peer pressure. Therefore, it is essential that we weigh the world's ways against the teaching of God's Word.

The world has a distorted view of purity. Simply put, it encourages you as a young man to do whatever you want, as long as you don't hurt anyone. This is a man-centered philosophy because it puts the individual at the center of the decision-making process. In other words, it puts you in charge and makes you ultimate. Let's see how Scripture presents us with a different picture than that of our culture:

Read Leviticus 11:44-45.

What does the word “holy” mean?

What do we mean when we say that God is holy? What does it look like for us to strive to be holy like God?

God is not like us (1 Sam. 2:2). He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever-present. He perfect in love, power, justice, and goodness.

In Leviticus 11:44-45, God is speaking to His covenant people. Because God is absolutely perfect, He cannot lower His standard of perfection. This is bad news for us. We are mandated by God to be absolutely holy, but we are not—we are broken, sinful, and rebellious. At the darkest reality of this truth is where we find the gospel. The gospel affirms the fact we're sinners who can never live out God's perfect standard. However, the gospel points us to Jesus Christ, who is fully God, and added full humanity to His nature in order to live out God's perfect standard in our place. When He suffered on the cross, He became a sponge and absorbed God's wrath in place of sinners like you and me. He surrendered his life, was buried in a grave, and rose three days later. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is evidence that the payment that He made for the sinners debt toward God was paid in full and accepted by God.

The word *holy* literally means “set apart.” When used in reference to God, it describes His other-ness.

So now sinners of every ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background who come to Jesus and admit they are guilty and incapable of saving themselves can be forgiven! God declares sinners who embrace Jesus as not guilty because Jesus has endured their punishment. Jesus then clothes them in His perfect righteousness! So the perfect Father looks upon the sinner, who is now a Christian, and He sees the perfect life of Jesus covering them. They are a part of the people of God, and because of Jesus' perfect life, they are welcomed into an eternal relationship with God.

SANCTIFICATION

Read Romans 13:11-14.

Once you have trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and are declared righteous in God's sight, what is next?

What did Paul mean when he said, "salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (v. 11)?

While Jesus saves us and seals us for eternity with Him in heaven the moment we believe (Eph. 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:3-5), there is another sense in which our salvation is not yet complete. The Bible speaks of salvation in past, present, and future terms—you have been saved (Eph. 2:8-9), you are being saved (2 Cor. 5:1-2), and you will be saved (Rom. 5:10). Paul challenged the church at Philippi to "work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12) because he understood that salvation is more than a one time event. Salvation is a process that begins the day we believe and continues the rest of our lives. Once we have been declared righteous through faith in Jesus, God calls us to begin the process of sanctification—the process of becoming what we are already declared to be. Sanctification is the process of gradually becoming more like Jesus. We will not be sanctified overnight or by our own power. It requires faith and effort. That is what this study is all about—how we, by God's grace and power, might strive to become more like Jesus by cultivating virtues He has given us as a means of growing.

According to verses 12-14, what does Paul challenge us to do?

How should our lives as Christians be distinct from the world with regard to purity? What does Paul challenge us to do in verse 14 to ensure that our lives are distinct?

Paul challenges us to put on Christ, to look to Him for strength and guidance in every area of life. Doing so contradicts the unholy lifestyle we used to live in before we met Jesus. To put on Christ, we must also put off who we were before we met Him. Colossians 3:10 tells us to put on the “new self”—the former life we used to live is gone because we are new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). All of these passages point us as men to the reality that all of our sins (even our sexual sins) can be forgiven in Christ because of His perfect work! This truth should serve as the motivation to strive for holiness and purity in all areas of life, especially sexuality.

PURITY

One final passage that is important to this conversation is Ephesians 6:10-18. Here Paul reminds us that our struggle for purity is a spiritual battle. Because every Christian is engaged in a spiritual war, God has equipped us with the proper attire to walk in victory. The armor of God provides us with protection as we engage in battle. It is designed for warfare, not fashion. Striving for purity without using the tools God has given us—prayer, Scripture, accountability—is similar to thinking we are equipped for war simply because we own a few camouflage shirts.

Read Ephesians 6:10-20.

Who provides the equipment we need for spiritual battle (v. 11)? How can we make sure we are prepared to battle our impure desires?

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Spiritually speaking, we are not civilians. We are in God’s army. In fact, Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 2:4 that we, as good soldiers, should not get caught up in civilian affairs that distract us from our marching orders (the Great Commission). So, the way we protect ourselves while living on mission is by utilizing the battle gear and weaponry God has provided us.

As it relates to the armor of God, we must find balance between two extreme misconceptions; our effort alone provides us with spiritual victory and God’s effort alone provides us with spiritual victory. In fact, the full armor of God reminds us

spiritual victory is a cooperative effort. In Ephesians 6:11, Paul tells us to “put on the full armor of God,” which means God supplies us with the armor, but we must put it on!

Make a list of the various pieces of equipment God provides for us to put on as we battle impurity. How is each essential to the fight?

God also provides us with clarity regarding what each piece of our armor does and how we are to use it. Ephesians 6:14-20 is one long run-on sentence in the Greek with two central verbs, “stand” and “take.” Verses 14-16 describe how we “stand”; by putting on the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, having our feet shod with the gospel of peace, and using the shield of faith.

Let’s take some time to work through these pieces of our armor:

BELT OF TRUTH

The belt of truth reminds us that a lifestyle of the Christian should be in harmony with the commands of Scripture. As it relates to the area of sexuality, Scripture teaches that God has given sex as a gift that is to be enjoyed between one man and one woman inside the covenant of marriage (1 Cor. 7:2-3; Heb. 13:4), and the means God has declared for the human race to reproduce (Gen. 1:28). Any sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage is sin.

BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The breastplate of righteousness speaks of the integrity of our spiritual walk with God, meaning our heart has been guarded by the righteousness of Christ and our lifestyle choices reflect this covering. It is a challenge for you to guard your heart by protecting it and not giving it to any woman besides your wife (Prov. 4:23-26).

FEET SHOD WITH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

The gospel is the ground we stand on. Every step we take, we have both “peace with God” because of Jesus’ finished work, and the “peace of God,” knowing that if we’re walking in obedience to His Word. We have no reason to fear being out of His will. We must trust God’s leadership over every step we take. By doing this we’ll never fear missing out on what the world is doing, and we will stay away from sexual sin (Prov. 3:5-6; Jer. 17:7-8).

SHIELD OF FAITH

The shield of faith gives us the ability to extinguish the attacks of the Enemy by trusting by faith all God has revealed in Scripture and applying the Bible's teaching to our lives. This involves taking every thought and filtering it through Scripture (2 Cor. 10:5) in order to determine if it is from God (if it's supported by Scripture) or the enemy of our soul, our flesh, or the world (if it contradicts Scripture). Remember, sexual sin starts in the mind first, so we must train ourselves to take our lustful thoughts to God's Word in order to fight off temptation to sin.

HELMET OF SALVATION

In verses 17-20, Paul describes what we're to "take" by commanding us to "take the helmet of salvation." Paul is telling us to guard our most vulnerable commodity, our mind, by resisting the massive blows (thoughts) the Enemy throws our way. Before we sin, we think about sinning. Our minds are the main battlefields of spiritual warfare!

SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, the Bible. Paul was not the only one who described the Word of God as a sword. The author of Hebrews said, "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). When it comes to the internal motivation of our actions, God's Word is powerful and fast acting. It exposes us from the inside out. Too often we lose the battles with the Enemy of our soul, the worldly system, and our flesh because we're not using our only offensive weapon!

I'm convinced many Christians do not walk in spiritual victory in purity over our sinful addictions (especially when it comes to sexual sin) and struggles because we're not using the weaponry God has given us. We're not leaning into the powerful truth of God's Word for the ammunition we need to overcome temptation.

Instead we turn to music, video games, friends, or we give in to temptation and sin. Not using the weaponry God has given us is like our military trying to fight ISIS with water guns! How foolish it would be for them to drop the weapons the government issued them to defeat the enemy and pick up plastic toys. If we use anything in our spiritual battle outside of the armor and weaponry God has given us, our Enemy will walk all over us. God is calling us to live lives of purity and He's given us all we need! Let's be the generation that introduces purity to our nation!

APPLY

What is the gospel? How does this message relate to your life?

Why is it crucial that we know and understand the gospel as we strive for purity?

List some areas of sin you struggle with. Then list the equipment God has provided you to battle against these sins (Eph. 6). What are you waiting for?

What desires do you need to cast off? What armor of God do you need to put on?

How might we support each other as brothers in Christ as we pursue purity?

READ

Read Matthew 4:1-11, taking special note of both the specific ways Satan sought to tempt Jesus, as well as how Jesus responded to each temptation.

REFLECT

In what specific ways have you been tempted to sin lately? What desires lie at the heart of these temptations?

How might you guard both your heart and your head against these temptations?

In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus is tempted on three occasions and not once did He quote His favorite rapper, actor, or movie line instead, He quoted Scripture. That's using the sword! It is not enough, however, to merely quote Scripture as if that is all it takes to fight sin. Jesus didn't just quote verses from the Old Testament as a magic mantra to shut Satan up—He actively believed the truths and promises found in God's Word. He trusted God's promises to provide for, protect, and establish His kingdom. The same is true for us when we are tempted to give in to sin. Just like Adam and Eve, we are being tempted to forget God's promises and distrust His Word. We need to both know God's Word and ask God for the strength we need to trust in its promises.

RESPOND

Journal a prayer to God, acknowledging the areas of your life where you have been struggling to be holy as He is holy (Lev. 11:44-45). What promises of God will you remind yourself of as you fight temptation in this area? How will you remember the gospel as you seek to fight temptation this week?