

The Temptation of Joseph

Intro: In our world it seems hardly realistic to think that young people or single adults will keep themselves sexually pure. Yet God has given clear guidelines for proper moral conduct. How is it possible to remain pure in a world so full of promiscuity?

Let consider the example of Joseph. The examples around Joseph would not have been the best to encourage him. His brother Judah had committed fornication with Tamar. His brother Reuben had slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah. Yet, in spite of these poor examples, Joseph was an outstanding example of moral purity and from the account of his life we can learn how it possible for have the same moral purity in our time.

The Temptation of Joseph

Moses gives us a carefully crafted presentation of the Joseph's success in Potiphar's house and his temptation by Potiphar's wife.

Gen. 39:1-21

Though Joseph suffered for his faithfulness, it is clear that he had developed the strength of will and character to resist temptation. But how did he do so?

Joseph had a proper view of:

Adversity

Anger is often the negative emotion that precipitates lust.

Not a few angry young people have resorted to immorality as a manifestation of rebellion against their parents or their circumstances.

Even married people may commit immorality in defiance of a mate.

If anyone had a reason to be angry, it was Joseph. He had been mistreated by his brothers, sold into bondage. Yet he did not use his adversity as an excuse to do wrong. He could have said, "I've gone through a lot; I've been forgotten by my family and by God. Why should I care what they have said. Where were they when I needed them? But he realized that bad experiences are not a reason for bad behavior!

Prosperity

More recently things had gone much better with Joseph. His "success" could have caused him to be filled with pride. He might have said, "I'm somebody now. I am a person of influence".

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. (Proverbs 16:18)

But in Joseph's case there was genuine humility. There was no sense of entitlement; Joseph did not allow his blessing to cause him to develop pride and selfishness that would misuse his privileges.

Master

Joseph's words about his master reveal the highest integrity as a worker.

But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife" (Genesis 39:8-9)

Joseph recognized the power his master had given him; but he kept himself strictly under the limitations his master had imposed upon him. Joseph would not abuse the trust of his master.

Immorality is a breach of trust.

Every married person needs to remember this. Our mates trust us to be faithful. Adultery is not called "cheating" for nothing. When a young person goes out, his parents trust in him/her to keep their purity.

We need to keep the trust committed to us.

Marriage

Note the last statement again: *"he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife"*.

Joseph's behavior reflects a proper regard for the institution of marriage. He understood that Potiphar's wife belonged to him; and that God had protected the rights of the married by the strongest penalties against adultery. There was never a time when adultery was not wrong.

In our lessons last week we noted God's design for marriage and how he sanctified the sexual relationship in marriage.

Joseph could have rationalized his immorality the way many young people do: "I can't help it. I'm only doing what comes natural. God gave me these desires. How can it be wrong to express them?"

But, no matter the rationalization, sexual activity outside of marriage is a failure to respect the boundaries of God and to demonstrate diminished respect for the institution of God.

Transgression

It is amazing to see how trivially people today look at fornication. It is considered a minor thing among the youth or even among consenting adults who are not married. Fornication is often winked at; in some societies it is expected that boys will be immoral.

Joseph saw adultery differently. It was a "great wickedness". Thus, Joseph did the only rational and spiritual thing. He "ran"—instantly, instinctively, and impolitely!

"Flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22).

God

In the end, the real issue in temptation is how we feel and think about God. If we see Him as our wise and loving Father who never withholds from us what is good, then we will see all sin as undesirable and contrary to our ultimate interest.

Joseph could have easily been tempted to take his future into his own hands. He could have said, "If I do what she asks, then I can be secure in my position". But such an act would have been a rejection of God's provision. On the other hand, he could have said, "What if I reject her? This may cause me to get fired". And in this case that is exactly what happened. Yet, even so Joseph did what was right, trusting in God to provide his needs. How God thinks about a matter is all that matters to a faithful child of God.

Conclusion: All these attitudes resulted in the right actions

He refused immediately

He counted the cost realistically

He resisted the pressure consistently

He avoid temptation strategically

He fled decisively

And so it must be with us.

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)