

See Bible study on this material on pages 11-12.

# PURE PASSION

## An Approach to Sexual Purity for Single Christian Men

by GRACEPRESS

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*The following paper outlines some ideas about sexual purity. Feedback from readers is most welcome. Please e-mail any comments to [purepassion@mail.com](mailto:purepassion@mail.com).*

### How should single Christian men deal with their sex drives?

This question is asked by most unmarried Christian men. These include not only adolescents but a growing number of men who are deferring marriage until their late twenties or beyond. Some of these men are postponing marriage until after college, a military commitment, or the start of a career. Others are waiting indefinitely because they prefer singleness or have not found a wife. The question is also asked by widowers and divorced men who are undecided whether to remarry.

### Biblical Guidelines

How does the Bible address the use of these drives? It gives four guidelines. They apply to all Christians, single and married, men and women.

1. Use of the sex drives must glorify God (I Corinthians 6:20).
2. It must build up spiritually the user and any spouse (I Corinthians 6:12).
3. It must not involve unmarried sex with a partner (I Corinthians 6:9-10; see also Leviticus 20:10-21).
4. It must not enslave; the user must control the sex drives, not vice versa (I Corinthians 6:12).

### Sexual Attitudes

Scripture teaches sexual guidelines apply above all to attitudes (Matthew 5:27-28; Mark 7:20-23; see also I John 2:15-16 and Philippians 4:8). In this regard, single Christian men (and all believers) should train their minds to praise and thank God for their physical bodies and drives (Psalm 139:13-14) and shun immoral fantasies and philosophies (see Romans 1:21ff).

There are at least four positive results of having pure attitudes toward sex:

1. Obedience to God (John 14:21).

2. Demonstration that a thankful heart and controlled will can rule sexual thoughts (Romans 1:21, Philippians 4:8).

3. Renewed trust in Scripture, which says control of thoughts is possible (Romans 12:2).

4. New confidence that the Spirit-controlled will can take corrective stands in other areas, such as anger, resentment and pride (Ephesians 4:22-23, 30-32).

Steps for developing pure sexual attitudes include:

1. Avoiding pornography, environments where illicit sex is condoned and available, and music with immoral content (see Psalm 1:1 and Proverbs 7).

2. Meditating on Scripture, including passages on the use of sex drives (see above).

3. Enlisting a trusted buddy to encourage and check you in steps 1 and 2 above (Proverbs 27:17, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

## Sexual Conduct

Transformed sexual attitudes are only half of Scripture's prescription for godly sexual responses. Sexual conduct must also be worthy of the altar (see Romans 12:1-2). What kinds of sexual behavior are appropriate for single Christian men?

There appears to be a range of scripturally allowable options, consistent with the spectrum of sexual temperaments or gifts (I Corinthians 7:7). Choosing which option is right is a matter of wisely discerning your sexual temperament (see "Choosing the Right Option," below).

## Limited Abstinence

At one end of the range of behavior options is **limited abstinence** from sex. "Limited" because, barring disease or injury, **men who are physically mature are unable to abstain completely from sex** because the male sex drive is nonoptional and inherent (Genesis 1:27). **All mature men regularly experience sex to some degree**, whether minute sexual feelings, erections of the penis, or seminal ejaculations.

The option of limited abstinence refers here only to curtailing certain voluntary responses, such as self-induced orgasms. These include not only intercourse (scripturally forbidden except in marriage) but self-release defined here as ejaculating free of sexual fantasies — and conscious masturbation — ejaculating while fantasizing (a distinction made by Herbert J. Miles in *Singles, Sex & Marriage*, chapter 10, Word: Waco, 1983). Limited abstinence does not typically include restraining "wet

dreams” (nocturnal emissions). These events often involve involuntary physical and psychological interaction (pressure from natural seminal buildup plus dream fantasies). See a further discussion on wet dreams under “Twelve Common Questions,” below.

Limited abstention appears to meet scriptural guidelines for handling sex drives because (by definition) it involves no unmarried sex with a partner, and it does not enslave. The “limited abstainer” is also able to glorify God, provided he joyfully acknowledges his God-given sex drives, even though not actively experiencing them. “Joyfully acknowledges” because God wants men to praise how he made their physical bodies and drives (Psalm 139:13-14). Moreover, the limited abstainer is able to build up his faith to the extent he credits God for empowering his abstention.

## Benefits of Limited Abstention

Illustrating these points are three benefits of limited abstention, paralleling the positive results of an obedient thought life (above):

1. Discovery that sexual drives, while nonoptional and inherent (Genesis 1:27), do not imply an irresistible need for conscious ejaculation. Some men with fully functioning sex drives testify to long periods of limited abstention.
2. Renewed trust in Scripture, which says sexual self-control is possible (Ephesians 5:3; see also I Corinthians 9:25-27).
3. New confidence that the Spirit-controlled will can govern other areas needing self-control, such as eating and drinking.

## Limited Abstention for the Wrong Reasons

There are cases, however, when limited abstention neither glorifies God nor builds up the believer spiritually. One case is when the abstainer’s only motives are earning the approval of other people and avoiding their condemnation. With such a person, limited abstention does not glorify God; the limited abstainer seeks a reward from men instead of God (Matthew 6:1-6). Neither does such abstention build up the man spiritually; rather, he ensnares himself to the extent his practice is based on fear of what others think (Proverbs 29:25).

Limited abstention is also ill-conceived when it is prompted by misunderstandings of Scripture. Some men, for example, while rightly noting the Bible’s distinction between holy and sinful sexual options, proceed wrongly to conclude the sex drives themselves are optional and can be turned off and on at will. On the contrary, because the Bible indicates sex drives are nonoptional and inherent (Genesis 1:27), it’s the use, not the possession, of sex drives that is optional (holy or sinful).

Uninformed (or unthankful) of these truths, however, a man may delude himself into trying to turn off his sex drives through abstinence and thereby shirk having to choose how to use his drives. So conceived, the effort will prove futile and frustrating (see Romans 1:21). The limited abstainer will find he is still subject to involuntary sexual responses (subtle feelings or — less deniably — erections), and he will feel defeated by his failure to avoid them. Because he misses the truth of Scripture on this subject, such a man will have difficulty glorifying God; for the same reason, the limited abstainer will have trouble building himself up spiritually (John 8:32, Philippians 4:6).

Other men misunderstand Scripture to say limited abstinence is the only godly sexual behavior for single men, when in fact the range of scripturally consistent options is broader.

## Self-release

These options all involve varying programs of **self-release**, depending on an individual's sexual gift (see "Choosing the Right Option," below). They meet scriptural guidelines provided four conditions are met:

1. The event is limited to self-release, defined here as a voluntary ejaculation *without lustful fantasizing*. Self-release must not give way to masturbation, which, as defined here, is a voluntary ejaculation accompanied by lustful fantasies and thus a violation of Scripture (Matthew 5:27-28).

2. The self-release occurs in a way that demonstrates the individual has control over his sex drives rather than vice versa, thus avoiding enslavement to the drives (I Corinthians 9:24-27). One procedure in particular may help men wishing to end — or prevent — enslavement. The procedure involves performing self-release at either predetermined times (e.g., once every Thursday) or "windows" (e.g., once any time between Monday through Thursday or Thursday through Saturday, etc.). The procedure is a substitute for simply yielding to the drives whenever they are powerful. Instead, it helps an individual *take charge* of his sex drives by assigning them an orderly place in his life (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Such a schedule should balance the desire for godly sex with the scriptural requirement for self control. (See "Six Steps for Developing a Godly Strategy of Self-release," below.)

3. The event is accompanied by praise to God for the sex drives, a practice also useful for blocking lustful fantasies.

4. The releaser seeks to build himself up spiritually by resolving to rely on scripturally consistent means to use his drives.

## Benefits of Self-release

There are at least seven benefits to self-release when based on these conditions:

1. It gives a man another way of glorifying God by enjoying how God has made him (Psalm 139:13-14).
2. This in turn provides a purpose for sexual release other than meeting physiological needs. Sex becomes a motivation for expression rather than a deficit to be filled — an outlook that is also important in marriage (Romans 6:13-14). (Lawrence J. Crabb Jr. draws an illuminating contrast between “expression motivation” and “deficit needs.” See *Effective Biblical Counseling*, chapter 4, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1977.)
3. As the individual praises God, the self-release helps him develop and reinforce a positive attitude toward sex.
4. It helps him learn that by banishing lustful fantasies during self-release he can experience sex without lust.
5. It shows him that by sticking to a schedule of self-release he can enjoy sex without enslavement — that he can master the sex drive rather than vice versa.
6. It develops self-control needed in marriage.
7. By helping achieve control of physical drives, self-release enables a man to divert more of his spiritual armor to controlling his sexual attitudes (see Ephesians 6:10-18). It is in one’s thought life that Christ says the war between holiness and lust is ultimately decided (Mark 7:20-23).

Thus far, in summary, five distinctions have been drawn:

1. **Total abstinence from sex:** physically impossible (except through disease or injury) due to a man’s many involuntary responses.
2. **Limited abstinence:** refraining from voluntary responses such as intercourse, masturbation and self-release.
3. **Masturbation:** voluntary ejaculation accompanied by lustful fantasy.
4. **Wet dreams:** involuntary ejaculations brought on by dream fantasies and seminal buildup.
5. **Self-release:** voluntary ejaculation subject to godly conditions.

## Twelve Common Questions

Below (in quotations) are 12 likely questions about self-release, each followed by a scripturally consistent response.

1. "Is the act of self-release sinful?" Self-release is notably absent from any biblical catalog of sexual sins. Such catalogs refer only to *unmarried sex with a partner* (see Leviticus 20:10-21). Furthermore, Jesus said biological functions of the body are not sinful in themselves, only lust of the heart and the consequent physical offenses (Mark 7:20-23). In addition, Levitical law indicates menstruation and seminal release, whether alone or with a woman (wife), were sinless acts (given no violation of other Scripture). The acts were the *only* kind of ceremonial uncleanness that did not require a sin offering (Leviticus 15:16ff).

2. "Doesn't self-release invariably involve lustful fantasy?" This happens only if the person *chooses* to think immorally during self-release. If he concentrates on praising God during self-release, no lustful fantasy need occur. And where there is no lust or other violation of Scripture, there is no sin (Mark 7:20-23).

3. "Can self-release become an enslaving habit?" This happens only if the person chooses to let it. If he sticks to a schedule, he demonstrates mastery over the sex drive. Scheduled self-release, moreover, presents a realistic alternative to lustful behavior. "Total" abstinence, because it is an impossible and deluding goal, is not a real option; it is no match against real temptation. Instead, a man is in the position of unwittingly choosing between "something and nothing" (sin versus an unrealistic option). With scheduled self-release, however, a man can choose between "something and something" (sin versus a righteous, practical option). As indicated earlier, rightly-based *limited abstinence* can also be a realistic alternative for some men.

4. "Is self-release the result of sin? Isn't it true that even if a man is able to suspend lust during self-release, it was lust that made him want to self-release in the first place?" This is not true if the motive for self-release is to reinforce scheduled self-release centered on praise to God.

5. "Isn't self-release sinful self-gratification, pleasure for pleasure's sake, and 'love of the act'?" This concern is valid if the practice is self-oriented. Self-release is a scripturally legitimate form of physical enjoyment, however, when it is God-oriented (full of praise to God for the sex drives) and free of lustful fantasies and enslavement (I Timothy 6:17). That God designed sex to be pleasurable is further demonstrated by the fact he intended men and women to be happy ("blessed") while having sexual relations (Genesis 1:28).

6. "Is it not true that self-release is followed by guilt? If so, isn't this proof the conscience condemns the practice?" True guilt is occasioned

only by sin. When self-release involves lustful fantasy and/or enslavement both scriptural violations, guilt will — and should — follow. When self-release avoids lust and enslavement, true guilt will not occur. Beware of guilty feelings that are not justified by Scripture (Revelation 12:10).

7. “Physical sex — isn’t it intended only for marriage?” While marriage is the only Bible-approved opportunity for sex with a partner, it is not the only Bible-mentioned opportunity for sinless sex. The Levitical law refers uncritically to male sexual release without a partner (Leviticus 15:16). Paul’s counsel that it is better to marry than to bum, moreover, does not eliminate self-release as an additional alternative for self-control. He recommends marriage if self-control is impossible (I Corinthians 7:9). Self-release makes sexual control possible and supplies a way to escape temptation (I Corinthians 10:13).

8. “Even if self-release is biblically defensible, isn’t the practice just a concession to lust-bent men, not the scriptural ideal, which is marriage?” Paul lists singleness as an acceptable, if not preferable, option over marriage. Men choosing singleness over marriage must still maintain self-control. Self-release helps provide self-control for one choosing to remain single — as well as a means to glorify God for the sex drives.

9. “Doesn’t self-release continue into marriage and distract from proper dependence on a man’s sexual relationship with his wife?” This distraction could happen if the man had engaged in lustful fantasies during self-release before marriage and was unable to transfer his thoughts completely to his wife upon marriage. Distraction could also occur if self-release were an enslaving habit before marriage and continues as an uncontrollable temptation afterwards. If an individual self-releases worshipfully and controllably before marriage, the practice should not become a distraction in marriage. Moreover, learning self-control through self-release as a single man should help the individual adjust his sexual motivation later to match his wife’s needs. Finally, self-release is a practical way to maintain self-control in marriage when one’s wife is absent for an extended time or ill.

10. “Does self-release thwart the purpose of sex, which is procreation? Procreation is one result of sex, not its purpose. The purpose of sex, as with all aspects of human creation, is to glorify God (reflect his image). Paul’s example of singleness, for example, is not depicted in Scripture as thwarting the purpose of sex. Paul fulfilled God’s purpose for his life (and body) — by glorifying him.

11. “Through self-release, does one become preoccupied with sex?” This is a valid concern if the preoccupation is self- or lust-oriented. If a man knows self-release will not indulge lust or enslavement, preoccupation may not occur. (If it is praise-oriented, however, any preoccupation may actually be acceptable.)

12. “Are wet dreams the preferred means of sexual release for single men, since:

a. “they are innocent?” Some wet dreams may be pure, some may not (as evidenced by some men’s recollections of lurid sexual fantasies accompanying their wet dreams). The events involve psychological and physical interaction (dream fantasies and seminal buildup).

b. “they are preferable to self-release because they occur subconsciously and involuntarily?” Many men awaken during their wet dreams in time consciously to experience orgasm as though during a consciously induced ejaculation. In any event Scripture nowhere commends forfeiting conscious choices to the subconscious (Jeremiah 17:9). Rather, Scripture encourages elevating subconscious choices to the conscious level where the Spirit-controlled will can govern them (Psalm 139:23-24, Proverbs 20:5, II Corinthians 10:5). (Perhaps erroneously, some Bible translations render Deuteronomy 23:10 as referring uncritically to wet dreams. The reference actually is to ceremonial uncleanness occurring accidentally at night. There could be many possible causes besides a wet dream, such as unintentionally touching an unclean garment in darkness.)

c. “they release only excess sperm?” Some men testify to having had multiple wet dreams the same night — more than would be necessitated by an excess sperm supply.

## A Strategy of Self-release

Here are six steps for developing a godly strategy of self-release:

1. Make a conscious decision of the will to obey the Bible. Forsake lustful fantasy and pornography — as well as any unmarried sex with a partner.

2. Resolve that any conscious sexual release you perform will be accompanied by praise to God for how he designed and equipped you.

3. Aim for a schedule of self-release that helps you achieve self-control. The schedule will differ from person to person. Schedules could be in terms of specific *days* or “*windows*.” For example, one man might choose to self-release “every five days,” or “every Saturday,” etc. Another man might opt to self-release once during the “last two days of the week” or some other “window.” Which option depends on the man’s temperament. One man may prefer fixed scheduling, the next man something more flexible. As you continue to choose scheduled instead of indiscriminate releases, you will reinforce godly sexual patterns and obtain more and more control in your sexual behavior.

4. Confide in a trusted buddy. Ask him to encourage you to stick to your schedule. Ask him to challenge you if he thinks your schedule sabotages self-control. In the long term, he can help you by asking two questions: “How’s your schedule?” and “How are your thoughts during self-release and other times?”

5. There may be an occasion when you would want to self-release ahead of schedule in order to prevent sin. (This is an emergency measure only, not listed as a routine option.) For example, if convinced you are uncontrollably tempted to view pornographic material or engage in unmarried sex with a partner, nip the temptation by self-releasing. Precede the self-release with a confession of any lust you may have committed up to that point. Then concentrate on nonlustful thoughts while you self-release. Include a prayer thanking God for your sex drives and the provision of self-release as a means of sexual control (I Corinthians 10:13). When your “sexual gyros” have been turned off through self-release, evaluate how you got into the temptation. Flirting with sin? Hanging around with the wrong crowd (Psalm 1:1)? Resolve to keep yourself from any further sources of temptation. Ask your buddy (above) to check your progress in this area.

6. Thank God for the victory!

## Choosing the Right Option

Choosing the right option for handling sex drives, whether limited abstinence or an appropriate schedule of self-release, is an individual matter. Beyond Scripture, there is no policy that is correct for everyone (I Corinthians 7:7). Here are some considerations for determining what’s wise for you:

1. Study what the Bible has to say about sex. Don’t unthinkingly accept (or reject) the conclusions of this paper as a shortcut.

2. If you decide the approach outlined in this paper makes scriptural sense, next determine your sexual gift (I Corinthians 7:7); i.e., ask yourself the extent to which sex is a godly motivation in your life. Do you regularly desire sexual release? Would you be able to maintain your desire and experience self-release without lustful fantasies? Would you be able to perform self-release as an expression of praise and gratitude toward God for the sex drives? If your answers are yes, you may be gifted with a moderate-to-strong sexual temperament and you may wish to consider a schedule of self-release that balances a godly desire for sex with the scriptural requirement for self-control. (One test of self-control: achieving an orgasm without having to invoke lustful fantasy.) On the other hand, if you answer that sex is not a significant motivation in your life, you may have the gift of limited abstinence. Even so, it is important joyfully to

acknowledge God through your attitudes for your sex drives, if not in your behavior.

3. It is possible that you may be gifted with a moderate-to-strong sexual temperament yet also be interested in experiencing the benefits of limited abstinence listed earlier in this paper. If so, you may wish to consider pursuing limited abstinence for a specific period (six months, for example) with the understanding you will resume your sexual temperament through scheduled self-release at the end of the period.

4. Avoid the error of believing the gift of limited abstinence is a holier endowment than a moderate-to-strong sexual temperament or vice versa. Scripture says these endowments are gifts from God (I Corinthians 7:7), and all gifts from God are holy. Accordingly, if God gave you a moderate-to-strong sexual temperament, why compare it unfavorably with limited abstinence? By the same token, if you have the gift of limited abstinence, avoid envying a stronger sexual temperament.

5. Discuss your plan with your buddy. (Urge him to conduct his own scriptural study, then compare notes.) Ask him to point out any blind spots in your thinking.

## A Note of Hope

A further note on the mental battle of holiness versus lust:

If limited abstinence and godly self-release demonstrate anything, it's that the Spirit-controlled will can make — and keep — holy choices. The limited abstainer chooses to praise God for his sex drives while doing without sexual activity. The self-releaser opts to praise God while enjoying sexual activity void of lust and enslavement. The limited abstainer and self-releaser thus show to themselves they can stick by their respective choices — in thought and deed. This breeds hope that other thoughts and deeds can be brought under the governance of the Spirit-controlled will (Romans 5:5).

Hope may thus be the most sublime yet powerful benefit of obeying God's guidelines for sex. As men develop confidence that these guidelines work, they gather new hope in the power of Scripture, in the Savior and in the life to come.

# PURE PASSION

## A Scriptural Study on Sexual Thought and Conduct

1. Read I Corinthians 6:12-20. Paul urges Christians to use their bodies morally, referring to one body function in particular. What is that function?
2. What does Paul mean by the word “honor” in verse 20 (New International Version)? Consult different translations of the same verse for amplification.
3. In view of your answers to the above questions, how would you paraphrase the concluding sentence in verse 20? Consider substituting for the word “body” the function you identified in question 1 above.
4. Read Romans 1:18-32. Why does Paul believe the situation described in the passage warrants the “wrath of God”?
5. According to verse 21, what omission started the sequence of sin described in the passage?
6. See verse 24. What area of sin led the list of offenses to God?
7. What principle — and warning — can be synthesized from Romans 1:21 and I Corinthians 6:20?
8. Take another look at I Corinthians 6:12-14. How would you paraphrase verse 12?
9. What is the main principle in the verse?
10. Compare verse 12 with a similar principle in I Corinthians 10:23-33. How would you paraphrase verses 23-24?
11. What does Paul mean when he advises us to seek “the good of others”?

*Notes*

12. How does Paul's advice apply to one's sexual conduct with other people?
13. What is the difference between the principles in I Corinthians 10:23-24 and I Corinthians 6:12?
14. Read Leviticus 20:10-21. List the categories of sin outlined in this passage.
15. Which phrase below best summarizes your list from question 14 above.?
- a. No sex except with a spouse.
  - b. No sex with someone else's spouse.
  - c. No sex with an animal.
  - d. No sex with a relative other than a spouse.
  - e. No unmarried sex with a partner.
  - f. No sex with the same gender.
16. See your answers to questions 7, 9, 12, and 15 above. List at least four principles from Scripture that govern sexual conduct.