



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
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March 2009

Is Abstinence unrealistic?

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The pregnancy of recent vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin's teen daughter Bristol has drawn much attention from the news media. From all reports, the Palins are handling the matter about as well as any family could, given their difficult circumstances. It is admirable that the young lady and her parents did not opt for an abortion as many would have in their shoes in our society. The parents did about the only thing parents can do when faced with this problem. They supported their daughter's decision to raise the child, offered their help, and encouraged her to prepare herself for the responsibilities of parenthood – things like finishing her education so that she can provide a living for herself and the child.

From the interviews of Bristol that I have seen, she seems to be a bright and articulate young lady. She freely acknowledges that, while she loves her baby very much, it would have been much better to have waited until she was older and married. Her advice to other teenagers is that they should wait.

Yet when asked if such abstinence is realistic, she replied, "No, it is not realistic at all." In this she shows that she has bought into the idea that is so prevalent today in our society – that while abstinence may be the ideal we cannot expect our children to actually practice it in this sex charged society in which they live. A similar notion is also wide spread concerning victims of an unscriptural divorce being expected to live a celibate life. So, the refrain sounds loud and clear both scenarios – "it is just not realistic."

So, parents, school officials, and various public

servants advocate providing contraceptives to kids as soon as they reach puberty because they really believe that abstinence is not a realistic choice. In the case of wrongfully divorced persons, since abstinence does not seem to be realistic, brethren have invented dubious methods of interpreting God's marriage law to allow for a wrongfully divorced person to remarry – after all, surely God would not expect them to follow the "unrealistic" course of abstinence.

Is abstinence really that unrealistic? Was Paul being unrealistic, when he as an apostle of the Lord commanded "flee fornication?" (1 Corinthians 6: 18). When it comes to one's "sex life," one is given only two choices. 1) abstinence or 2) a (God approved) marriage. (Hebrews 13:5; 1 Corinthians 7:2). No one says that celibacy is the easy option for young people. But to say that it is impossible or even unrealistic is to fly in the face of what God has commanded.

It requires constant vigilance to minimize temptation. When Paul said to *flee* fornication, he did not mean to hang around it, nor to flirt with it, nor invite it in – but to run away from it as fast as you can. He doesn't mean to see how far you can go without "going all the way," because such a course usually results in going all the way. The consequences of "going all the way," is far more serious than a pregnancy or contacting an STD. It is sinning against the God of heaven and earth.

Involved in "fleeing fornication" is keeping oneself away from situations where it would be easy to lose self-control. Parents can go a long way in steering their children away from such dangerous situations by talking

with them and making it their business to know the kind of things their children are involved in and with whom. They can also help provide occasions for their young “love birds” to enjoy time together with other folks being in close enough proximity to deter their becoming too intimate. The young people themselves, if they really want to please God, will stay away from situations where there would be a chance that they would lose control of their passions. They need to remind themselves that fornication (sex outside of marriage) can have many unwanted consequences in this life and will certainly have dire consequences if they should die (which can be anytime) without being forgiven of the sin. “Be not deceived: neither **fornicators**, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor 6:9-10). It is no wonder that the apostle goes on down in verse 18 and says, “flee fornication.”

Here are some things that young people can stay away from that will greatly improve their chances of avoiding being overcome by this soul damning sin:

1. **Avoid wearing provocative clothing.** Those who profess godliness are to wear modest clothing (1 Timothy 2:9). The wise man warned of those who wore “the attire of a harlot.” (Proverbs 7:6ff).
2. **Avoid provocative language, gestures, movies, TV, and literature.** The natural desire of young couples for each other is strong enough without pouring such lethal fuel onto the fire.
3. **Avoid prolonged close bodily contact**, such as dancing and other ways of bringing bodies together in such close contact.
4. **Last but by no means least, read and reread together what the Bible says about such matters.** Passages like, Matthew 5:28, “ But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”; Romans 13:14,

“... make no provisions for the flesh, to fulfill its lust.” These verses and those that speak of “lasciviousness” are warning against things that lead to fornication. One dictionary that I have succinctly defines “lascivious” : “1. To lust; 2. To show lust; 3. To cause lust.”

It is great when one recognizes what ought to be done, but it is even greater for one to recognize that it can be done. We all need to understand that what ever God commands and expects of us is realistic, is for our good, and that we should expect no less of ourselves and of those whom God has placed in our care – our children. Let us show compassion and understanding toward young people as they go through the difficult period of passing from childhood into adulthood. It is truly a trying time in their lives – even a confusing time. But let us also impress upon them that *it is realistic* to expect them to “flee youthful lusts” and to keep themselves pure (2 Timothy 2: 22; 1 Timothy 5: 22).

There is another thing that needs to be considered. As easy and pleasant as it is to be drawn into a premarital sexual relationship, it is just as hard for one to genuinely repent of it. It can and must be done, but it means that one must bring himself/herself to be sorry after a “godly sort” (2 Corinthians 7:11) and not just sorry because circumstances causes their sin to be exposed so as to disappoint others that care about them or brings them other unpleasant temporal consequences. If such consequences do not arise, because of the pleasure involved, once started it is awfully hard to bring one to be sorry enough to repent of it and stop its practice. A few years ago, during a gospel meeting that I was preaching in, a young lady came forward with tears streaming to confess her sinful relationship with her boyfriend. She told me later how hard it was for her to make that decision. She said, “It is just like getting a divorce.” I believe she truly repented. Her case is unusual. Few are willing to give up the pleasure to please God. However, repentance, like abstinence, is realistic. It can be done or God would not have commanded it.

Insolence

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Among the ungodly attitudes of the pagan world, described in the first chapter of Romans, was that of being *despiteful* (KJV) or *insolent* (ASV, NIV) (verse 30). It is translated from *hubristes*, which according to Thayer means “1) an insolent man 2) one who, uplifted with pride, either heaps insulting language upon others or does them some shameful act of wrong”. To be insolent is to be “disrespectful of custom or established authority; impertinent, impudent.” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*) God says that “they who commit such things are worthy of death” (verse 32).

Maybe it is just our casual, care-free society, but I think I see a disturbing trend among professed Christians toward this sin. Behavior and speech toward and about those who should command our special reverence and respect seems to have deteriorated into a near-insolent stance, if not completely so. “Hi Dad,” is hardly the way to address the Ruler of the universe as was reportedly done by a young man in a public prayer in a Texas congregation. God is not a mere “buddy,” but our Maker and Sustainer, with all the majesty that goes with it. Around the world there is a steady decline in showing respect for those should be given special honor.

One needs to keep in mind that there are those greater than he for various reasons, before whom he displays special respect and not to be approached as peers. It might have been alright for Joseph to have enjoyed the “casual look” in the company of his fellow prisoners, but when the Pharaoh sent for him he “shaved himself, and changed his raiment” (Gen. 41:14). Special respect was called for when standing in the king's presence, so Joseph had some getting ready to do. Insolence grows out of an unholy pride that says, “I am equal in rank to anybody and probably greater than most” — an attitude completely foreign to the very spirit taught by Jesus, our Savior (Matt. 18:1-3).



The first seeds of insolence are usually sown in the home. Children are *allowed* to insult parents without fear of consequences. “Disobedient to parents” is also listed in verse 30. Children need to be made aware of the fact that parents have a special place of honor (Eph. 6:2). They may not always be perfect, but they are always parents. One's parents are not to be treated, spoken to or spoken about disrespectfully. It is a shame the way some children give their parents the lip. One may not have to agree with his parents always — but he should disagree with respect. The idea that a father should be just like a “buddy” to his son or a mother should be just like a “pal” to her daughter, in my judgement, contributes to the tread toward disrespect. A young man or young lady can find buddies and pals all over the place, but only one dad and one mom to look up to. They are special! They command special respect and consideration.

Special respect for age is a biblically sound principle. “Thou shalt rise before the hoary (white or grey) head, and honour the face of the old man...” (Lev.

19:32). Elihu had urgent words for Job, but he “waited til Job had spoken, because they were elder than he.” (Job 32:4). The New Testament commands respect for age (1 Tim. 5:1-2). The elder (older man) is to be corrected more gently than a younger man. Older people should be addressed with extra respect, different from one's peers. Older people need correction from time to time. They should receive it, but it should be with less sharpness than for a younger person.

“Civil disobedience” are words coined in our time to cover up for old-fashioned rebellion and anarchy. A faithful Christian will have no part of it. He is commanded to show respect and obedience to civil authority for conscience sake. (Rom. 13:1-5). He shows honor and respect for civil officials (1 Pet. 2:17; 1 Tim. 2:1-2) even when the officials themselves may be less than honorable. Time may come that one must obey the higher authority of God, as did the apostles on occasion (Acts 5:29), but even then he *respectfully* disobeys civil authorities. It may be necessary to rebuke the moral conduct of public officials, as did John the Baptist in the case of Herod, but even there it should be done without a spirit of insolence or rancor. In all this, one must not confuse his own likes and dislikes or his own sense of fairness and justice with the will of God. If one must ignore or otherwise disobey public officials—he should be prepared to point to the specific decree of God that is violated by the civil law. This, the apostles could do. They were under orders from heaven to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15,16; Matt. 28:18-20), the very thing the officials were prohibiting.

In the church, there is a disturbing drift toward despising the spiritually mature. Elders are to be “esteemed very highly in love for their works sake” (1 Thess. 5:12,13) and are to be especially “remembered” and “honored” (Heb. 13:7,17). Yet, in many places elders (and older preachers) are esteemed very lowly. This does not mean to accept, without investigation, anything they might say or do (cf. Acts 17:11). This does not mean to exalt anyone into some kind of “clergy.” This does mean to show respect due one for his “works sake” and years of experience. One's years of

study and experience in the word of God should count for something. Yet, there is a marked trend in the church to discount the value of such maturity of knowledge and experience. Too often, a young “know-it-all” expects his judgement to be worth just as much or more than that of his more experienced brethren. It is too easy to lightly toss aside the teaching and advice of mature brethren, with a “well-that-is-just-his-opinion” attitude without adequate consideration of the matter in the light of the scriptures; and the fact that experienced brethren are more likely to see dangers easily overlooked by the inexperienced. If, after due consideration, it is proven that the mature person has indeed erred in word or deed—the correction process should be set into motion, but with all the respect for the age and experience of the erring one. The fact that one may have spent years in study and application of the Scriptures means nothing to the novice overcome by pride and a sense of his own importance—he must let folks know that he can “do his own thing” and thinking. For shame! On the other hand, more mature brethren would do well to watch their pride in dealing with others—one can be wrong at any level of experience!

Above all, one must approach **God** in all reverence. One should respect His name (Matt. 6:19). One should reverence the Bible as the word of **God**. One should worship Him in reverence (John 4:24). When we meet for public worship, we pray to **God**. We sing to **God**. We study and preach **God's** word. We remember **Christ's** death in the **Lord's** supper. These things should be approached with all the awe that these facts and the occasion demands and not with a casual attitude. One's appearance and deportment in worship should be above the casualness of a dormitory bull-session, a sports pep rally or just hanging around the house. Yet, I fear that it is often approached with just such informal casualness—even though the service is directed to the most majestic and powerful of all beings, the God of heaven.

The gospel of Christ, applied to the heart, will remove insolence from our lives—if believed and obeyed. (Rom. 1:16) edbragwell@edssermionsandthings.com