

# Scripture for Chastity

*Deuteronomy 22* considers consensual adultery as a capital crime, and rape involves the responsibility of marriage. In a society where wives were their husbands' property enormous value was set on virginity at the time of marriage, and in a world where unmarried or divorced women, even widows, had little hope of dignity or support, this (to us) horrendous principle yet bears witness to the sense that adultery and fornication are *crimes* which demand redress.

The prophets use the vocabulary of sexual promiscuity to typify infidelity in religion, and the implication is reversible. Belonging to God is incompatible with illicit or irresponsible sexual activity. The Bible knows that humanity cannot fall into compulsive behaviour without disaster; we remain very physical by nature, but it remains *a fortiori* vital that we do not model ourselves on animals.

## God Speaks To Israel, His Unfaithful Wife

To court, take your mother to court! She is no longer my wife, nor am I her husband. She must either remove her whoring ways from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts, or I shall strip her and expose her, as on the day of her birth; I shall make her as bare as the desert, as dry as arid country, and let her die of thirst. I shall feel no pity for her children, since they are the children of her whorings. Yes, their mother has been a whore, she who conceived them has disgraced herself, by saying: *I will chase after my lovers, they will assure me of my keep, my wool, my flax, my oil and my drinks.*

This is why I shall block her way with thorns, and wall her in to stop her in her tracks. If she chases her lovers she will not catch them: if she looks for them she will not find them: and then she will say: *I shall go back to my first husband. I was better off then than I am now.* She had never realised before that I was the one who was giving her the grain, the new wine and the oil, giving her ever more silver and gold - which she used for her idolatry! This is why I shall take back my grain when it is due, and my new wine when its season comes. I shall withdraw my wool and flax which were to cover her naked body; I will display her infamy before her lovers' eyes - no-one will take her from me then! I shall put an end to her merrymaking, her festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbaths and her solemn feasts. I shall make her vines and figtrees derelict, of which she used to say: *These are the pay my lovers gave me.* I shall turn them into a jungle, and the wild animals will feed on them. I mean to exact payment from her for the feasts at which she burnt incense to idols, when she tricked herself out in her earrings and necklaces, to chase after her lovers, and forgot me, says the Lord.

*Hosea 1:4-15*

## Christian Scripture on Chastity

The figure of Jesus himself dominates this area. Paul is shocked to discover that his beloved, gifted, ebullient Corinthian church is riddled with paganism, and that his own announcement that *Christians do not labour under the burdens of the Jewish Law* has been taken to mean *it doesn't matter what you do*. He weighs in with a vengeance, making it clear that Christians must behave in a way that shows a fitting response to God's gift of grace. We do not *earn* salvation by our behaviour, but our behaviour must be worthy of people who have been ransomed, restored, and forgiven by the free gift of God's grace.

It is widely reported that there is sexual immorality among you, immorality unheard of even amongst gentiles...and you so filled with your self-importance! It would have been better if you had been grieving bitterly, so that the man who has done this thing were turned out of the community....your self satisfaction is

ill-founded. Do you not realise that the slightest trace of yeast can leaven the whole batch of dough? Throw out the old yeast so that you can be the fresh dough, unleavened as you are. For our Passover has been sacrificed – that is, Christ; let us keep the feast then, with none of the old yeast, and no leavening of evil and wickedness, but only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

In my letter I wrote to you that you should have nothing to do with people living immoral lives. I was not including everybody in this present world who is sexually immoral, or everybody who is greedy, or dishonest, or worships false gods – that would mean you would have to cut yourself off completely from the world. In fact, what I meant was that you were not to have anything to do with *anyone going by the name of brother* who is sexually immoral, or is greedy, or worships false gods, or is a slanderer, or a drunkard, or dishonest: you are never even to have a meal with anyone of that kind. It is no concern of mine to judge outsiders. It is for you to judge those who are inside, is it not? But outsiders are for God to judge.

*You must banish this evil-doer from among you.*

*1 Corinthians 5:1-*

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### **Living Towards the Mystery of Salvation**

Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us,  
by letting us be called God's children;  
and that is what we are.

Because the world refused to acknowledge him,  
therefore it does not acknowledge us.

My dear people, we are already the children of God  
but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed.  
All we know is, that when it is revealed, we shall be like him,  
because we shall see him as he really is.

Surely, everyone who entertains this hope  
must purify himself, must try to be as pure as Christ.

Whoever sins, acts wickedly (all sin is wickedness).

Now you are well aware that he has appeared in order to take sins away,  
and that in him there is no sin.

No-one who remains in him sins,  
and whoever sins has neither seen him nor recognised him.

Children, do not let anyone lead you astray.

*1 John 3:1-7*