

Cross-Cultural Worker Singles Issues: Celibacy and Chastity

Celibacy and chastity are synonyms, aren't they? The dictionary seems to have the same definitions for both. If you look one up in a thesaurus, the other one comes up as a synonym. That is like stating that something is redundant, and it says the same thing!

Lost in Translation

Who would know more about things getting lost in translation than cross-cultural workers serving in places other than their passport culture? Such cross-cultural workers are keenly aware of trying to explain the concepts of Christianity in cultures which may not even have such a concept, much less have a word for the concept.

Contemporary English has appropriated two different Latin words with different meanings and now uses those two words as synonyms. This results in confusion between the two related concepts. In requiring vows of celibacy for priests and nuns, the Roman Catholic Church also often got chastity as well. However, when Western culture required celibacy of all adolescents, it did not get chastity nearly as often.

Celibacy

The word "celibate" is from the Latin *celibatus*, which literally means "a single life." By definition unmarried persons are celibate. Dictionaries up to the middle of the 20th century typically defined "celibacy" as "an unmarried state; single life."

Today's dictionaries often still have that definition but usually add another definition which includes abstaining from sexual intercourse, and they give chastity as a synonym. *Encyclopedia Britannica* online reads: "**celibacy**, the state of being unmarried and, therefore, sexually abstinent." Rather than propose a new word meaning "unmarried" I am using celibacy in its original meaning. As you read please remember that celibacy means unmarried, nothing more. I am married, so I am not celibate. If you are unmarried you are celibate.

Chastity

The word "chaste" is from the Latin *castus* which literally means "pure." Dictionaries up to the middle of the 20th century typically defined "chastity" as "not indulging in illicit sexual intercourse; virtuous."

Today's dictionaries often define it as purity, but add something about not being married. Again, rather than propose a new word meaning "sexual purity," I am using chastity in its original meaning. While reading this, please remember that is the only meaning of the word. Individuals may live in any of the following four states.

- Neither celibate nor chaste: Married and engaging in illicit sexual intercourse.
- Both celibate and chaste: Single and not engaging in sexual intercourse.
- Celibate but not chaste: Single and engaging in sexual intercourse.
- Chaste but not celibate: Married and engaging in sexual intercourse only with spouse.

Required Celibacy; not Chastity

The "therefore" in the quote from *Encyclopedia Britannica* above is what people in Western cultures used to believe. That is, if individuals were unmarried, they would be sexually abstinent. Making this assumption, Legislators in many Western cultures raised the legal age at which people could marry, assuming that these young unmarried people would abstain from sexual intercourse.

As we well know now, that often is not the case. As reported in *Public Health Reports* the National Survey of Family Growth found in 2002 that by age 18 60% of the men and 54% of the women reported that they had experienced premarital sex. These adolescents were nearly all unmarried (not old enough to legally marry), so they were living in celibacy but not chastity.

People may not tell the full truth on surveys, but other data confirms that many unmarried people have sex. The USA Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that in 41% of all births in 2008 were to unmarried women 15-44 years of age. Those 1,700,000 women were living in celibacy, but they were not chaste. They were unmarried, but they had illicit sexual intercourse.

Sexually transmitted disease rates in the USA are at historic highs. The CDC reported the rates of gonorrhea by age and sex and the highest rates of any group are women 15-19 years of age. Many of those cases are gonorrhea of the pharynx contracted by these young women giving oral sex to their male friends. These thousands of people are living in celibacy (illegal for them to marry until at least age 18) but not in chastity.

When General Booth and other well-meaning people campaigned to have the minimum legal age of marriages raised to 16,

it is unlikely that any of them anticipated that two of every five babies born in the USA would be to unmarried mothers.

Celibacy's threats to Chastity

Three times in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul mentioned that remaining unmarried could threaten one's purity.

- Since there is so much immorality both men and women should marry to have their own spouses (v. 2).
- If people can't control themselves, it is better to marry than to burn with passion (v. 9).
- If a man believes he is acting improperly toward his fiancé who is getting older, it is good for him to marry her (v. 36).

What can we do?

The most important thing single cross-cultural workers can do to maintain sexual purity is to love God with their whole beings, their heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10, Deuteronomy 6). Your relationship to God must take top priority

- Have a daily, consistent devotional time to maintain your relationship with God. Include at least reading Scripture, meditating, and praying. (Bible study for sermon preparation, writing, teaching preparation, and so forth is not enough!)
- Receive God's love, experience God's love, surrender to his love and let him love you (as a Single).
- Make a specific commitment to God to live a holy life free of sexual sin. Write this commitment down and place it where you will see it daily (desk, mirror, etc.).

- Study, meditate on, memorize, and apply scripture on this topic. Note that in the major passages where the Bible talks about being holy it is in the context of sexual sin (Leviticus 18-20, I Corinthians 5-7). Review these on a regular basis.

The second most important thing single cross-cultural workers can do to maintain sexual purity is to love others (Luke 10, Leviticus 19). Your love relationships with others must have a high priority as well. Relative to sexual purity this would include the following.

- Learn the cues in your host country that signal sexual purity and sexual availability. These include such things as dress, eye contact, posture, gestures, and so forth.
- Be aware that even within cultures people vary widely on the meaning of touch. Something you consider indicating only friendship may be interpreted as sexual by another person. Touch is not improper, but be aware that what you mean as “good touch” may be interpreted by another as “bad touch” or erotic touch.
- Be especially alert when in “high risk” situations, such as being alone with another person, spending prolonged time working with another person, and so forth.
- Meet weekly an accountability partner (or group) to answer specific questions about your sexual purity.

The third most important thing that single cross-cultural workers can do to maintain sexual purity is to love themselves, to care for themselves as they care for others.

- Accept your own vulnerability. 1 Corinthians 10:12 reminds us that if we think we are standing firm, we must be careful or we will fall.
- List (actually write them down) sexual things you will not do, such as those found in Leviticus 18-20.

- List sexual things that may be permissible but not beneficial, things that may master you as in 1 Corinthians 6. These are things not specifically mentioned in Scripture, such as certain movies, music, TV shows, books, Internet sites, and so forth. These are not necessarily sinful, but they may lead to sinful behavior.
- Concentrate on “renewing your mind” as described in Colossians 3 and in Ephesians 4. Take every thought captive to make it obedient to God as described in 2 Corinthians 10. Think on the kinds of things mentioned in Philippians 4.
- Avoid danger zones for you. If you know that you are tempted visually, do not watch videos or TV shows that you know will contain graphic sexual images. If you know that you are tempted verbally, do not visit Internet chat rooms or read explicit romance novels.
- Develop an early warning system to increase your awareness of problems coming. Knowing that you will be talking with an accountability partner is likely to make you more aware of danger zones.
- Develop a plan for combating temptations which will occur in spite of your attempts to avoid them. If your greatest temptation is visual images, train your eyes to “bounce” away from such images as soon as they appear. If your temptation is through touch, train yourself to withdraw as soon as any touch becomes erotic.

Joseph was a handsome, single, young man with hormones raging (just past puberty) when he was taken to a different culture. When his boss’ wife asked him to have sex with her, he politely refused and gave her good reasons for his refusal. He refused her repeated requests. One time when he went to work and they were alone in the house, she

grabbed his coat and asked for sex, but he left his coat and ran out of the house. You can maintain your sexual purity too, but you may have to run from a person, or your computer!

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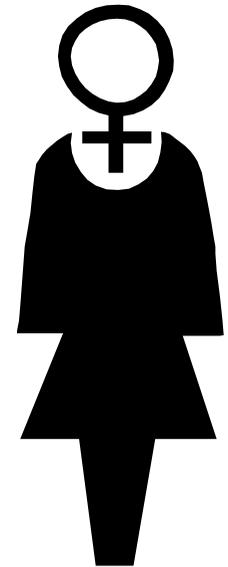
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