

“Lewd & Lascivious Behavior”

by Wayne Goff

A man was convicted in Bradenton, Florida of having sex on a Florida beach in front of families. The event made national news and you may have seen reports already on TV or other media.

What caught my eye were the charges: “two counts of lewd and lascivious behavior.” You don’t see those words in American media very often. But the man was convicted of just that! So do those words appear in the Bible, and if so, do they mean the same thing?

“Lewd” or “lewdness” appears repeatedly in the NKJV and has reference to rape (Judges 20:6), and fornication and adultery (Jeremiah 11:15; 13:27; Ezekiel 22:11; 23:27). In the New Testament, it is found in the list of sins (Mark 7:22), and in association with other sins as revelry, drunkenness, and lust (Romans 13:13). It is a work of the flesh which will prevent one from going to heaven (Galatians 5:19). It describes the conduct of those whose conscience no longer pains them in their vile conduct (Ephesians 4:19). It is the conduct of the Gentiles (1 Peter 4:3) which Christians no longer practice.

Sadly, some first century Christians were practicing lewdness and getting away with it, **temporarily** (2 Corinthians 12:21; Jude 4). Let none of us be guilty of the same today!

“Lewdness” comes from a Greek word which means “unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, and insolence” [Thayer]. The idea in all of this is the kind of immoral conduct which is done without shame, remorse or restraint.

The KJV used the word “*lasciviousness*” or “*lascivious*” to translate the word, and of course, means the same thing as described above.

This article is written to point out to Christians today the meaning of the words “*lewd*,” “*licentious*,” and “*lascivious*.” They all mean the same thing and are synonymous with one another. But too often their meaning is seen as obscure to Americans today who do not see those words used often, and are confused as to what they mean when they do see them. Perhaps this reference will help clear up any misconceptions.

A final note of warning is this: just because you don’t know a certain action is sinful does not mean you cannot be guilty of it! Indeed, there are probably those in our society today who have **no idea** that “living together in a committed relationship” is described in the Bible as **fornication** or **adultery**. But it is true just the same, and God will not forgive such sins until they are recognized, repented of, and prayed for. Perhaps there are some who have no idea what “*lewdness*” is, and they might be guilty of such without even knowing it! Thus the reason for the explanation in such articles as this. Of course, I would suspect that even the vilest sinner might have an idea that what is called “*lewd*” is wrong. But we cannot assume that to be the case.

Dear reader, be sure you understand what sins are condemned in the Bible. Study them to be sure you know what they are, and that you do your best to avoid such behavior. Study the lists in Galatians 5:19-21 and Mark 7:21-22 to be sure you know what these sins are. God expects you to know them.

“Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,” says the LORD” (Jeremiah 6:15).

Legal definition of “lewdness:” “Behavior that is deemed morally impure or unacceptable in a sexual sense; open and public indecency tending to corrupt the morals of the community; gross or wanton indecency in sexual relations.

“An important element of lewdness is openness. Lewdness is sometimes used interchangeably with licentiousness or lasciviousness, which both relate to debauchery and moral turpitude. It is a specific offense in certain state statutes and is included in general provisions in others.”

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