

simple rule to summarize Paul's thoughts here: In terms of marital intimacy, neither partner has the power of veto; both should be sensitive to the other.

The implications of rendering conjugal duty may not be easy for every couple to hear, especially if your marriage bed has become frigid. But identifying the sin is a great start toward restoration. Begin with repentance and make a promise to obey God's word to develop greater intimacy with your spouse. Start with small expressions of affection for each other.

Intimacy with Christ?

The Bible boldly compares the union between Christ and his people with the union between a husband and a wife (esp. Eph. 5). In fact, that is *the* main thought for Paul in that great chapter on marriage (v. 32). Why is Christ's marriage to us important as we seek victory in the arena of sexuality?

On his part he keeps perfect fidelity (Heb. 7:26). He satisfies the desires of our hearts. He provides us with constant companionship. In our marriage to him he rescues us from the loneliness and self-satisfying ways of unbelief. He forgives ALL our sins. In short, he gives us what no one else can.

In light of all this, is it too much that he calls us to scrupulous fidelity?

¹ Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 108

ⁱⁱ Accessed on December 6, 2010 from <http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/facts/mediafacts.asp>



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PROCLAMATION

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SEXUAL INTEGRITY:

HONORING GOD INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE

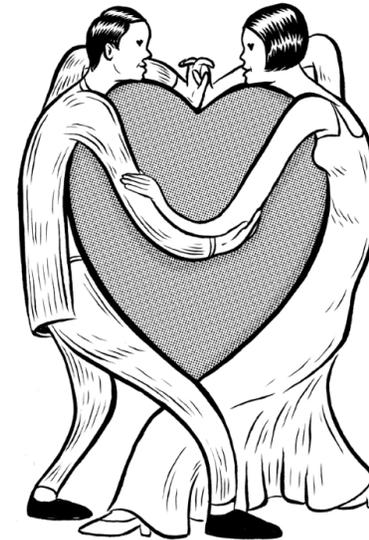
BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

In our day few of God's commandments speak to our culture as powerfully as the seventh. The command is simple and brief: "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). But encapsulated in this statement on human sexuality is the idea that, "All unchastity is accursed of God; and that we must, therefore, detest it from our heart, and live a chaste and continent life both within and outside of holy wedlock."¹ Surrounded as we are by rampant sexuality, God's call for purity challenges our culture head on. It is doubtful, however, whether Christians have responded properly to this challenge.

In some extreme cases the church has nearly adopted the sexual mores of the culture: embracing homosexu-

ality, winking at promiscuity and sexual experimentation, or rejecting marriage altogether.

In other circles, the church has failed to respond at all and has practically brushed the entire issue of sexuality under the rug. Have we adopted a "don't ask, don't tell" policy with regard to issues of intimacy? Should we really not be talking about these things? If the church is silent, the world is talking. More importantly, God is talking about sexuality. For us to begin talking rightly about intimate issues we need to understand what God says.



Christian Overview of Sexuality

Two prominent thoughts help us avoid the imbalances of sexual prudery, on the one hand, and sexual promiscuity on the other.

Sexuality is Good and Should be Expressed

Of course, the Bible says that sexuality should be expressed in the context of a marriage between a man and a woman (Mark 10:6-9). Christians are not always so vocal.

Well-intentioned parents have sometimes raised young adults to think that human sexuality is a bad thing. Some adults have so squelched discussion on this topic that their children and teens aren't comfortable approaching them with questions and concerns. Among other problems that arise from such an approach, a negative view of sexuality can bring confusion and conflict into a new marriage.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed each other intimately with no shame (Gen. 2:24,25). Shame and guilt did come into the world after sin, but these are appropriate responses to sexual *deviancy* only, not to sexuality itself. Moreover, those who have been recreated in the image of God are again able to enjoy intimacy with a spouse without shame.

God Detests Sexual Immorality

The main reason that God gives for his disapproval of deviant sexuality is that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Sexual sins are uniquely offensive in that they are sins against the body, which belongs to God (1 Cor. 6:18).

These two thoughts, that sexuality itself is good, but only when expressed rightly, anticipates the practical question, "What does sexual integrity look like?" Sexual integrity consists of putting off that which is forbidden and embracing that which is commanded.

Sins Forbidden

We are tempted to define sin too narrowly, especially in regard to sexual integrity. "As long as I don't cross that last line of intimacy I'm okay," we may be tempted to reason. God's standard is different. He forbid sinful thoughts, words and actions since each ultimately flow from the heart (Matt. 5:28).

Sinful Thoughts, Words and Actions

Our flesh quickly protests: "What control do I have over my thoughts?"

The Puritan John Bunyan answered this protest. If sin knocks at your door, he counseled, you have not sinned if you shut it as soon as you recognize it for what it is. An inappropriate thought that comes into one's head is not sin; encouraging, entertaining and pursuing that "uninvited guest" is.

Not only do we have control over how we respond to our thoughts but we also have some control over what we put into our minds. It is no wonder that people today have such a difficult time maintaining purity when they take in so much impurity.

In a sample of programming from the 2001-2002 TV season, sexual content appeared in 64% of all TV programs. Those programs with sexually related material had an average of four scenes per hour. One out of every seven programs includes a portrayal of sexual intercourse. With regard to parental monitoring, 44% of kids say they watch something different when they're alone than with their parents.ⁱⁱ

If God forbids unchaste thoughts then he obviously forbids illicit words and actions including both those committed alone or with another person.

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3,4).

How to Flee Sexual Sin

It's one thing to itemize our sins; it's quite another to fight against them. How should we flee sexual immorality? Jesus tells us to take drastic measures (Matt. 5). What might this look like in terms of an action plan?

First, begin with a proper view of the matter. If we start with an unbiblical view of sexuality the battle to resist it is more than half-lost.

Second, pray. Those struggling with this issue will be able to identify situations and settings that are especially tempting for them. Prepare for these times with prayer that pointedly addresses the temptation.

Third, avoid tempting situations. We need to be sincere when we ask God to "lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13). We need to watch *and* pray. Pray for help and then watch our lives.

Fourth, flee temptation. Even after having taken the above precautions impure sexual desires may still become strong. In these times evasive actions should be taken (see Gen. 39). Get up! Take a walk! Then repeat steps 1-3.

Fifth, become accountable to someone who genuinely cares for your spiritual well-being. Sin flourishes in secret. For a married person, the obvious (and perhaps most difficult) person with whom to seek accountability is your spouse.

Duties required

Perhaps the simplest and most comprehensive way to describe the duties that flow from the seventh commandment is this: Modesty in general; robustness in marriage.

Modesty

Issues of modesty relate to everything from the clothes we wear to the things we say to the looks we give. Modesty can never ultimately be about rules; it is a reflection of our love for God and others. The modest person says, "I respect the limits that God has placed around sexuality and I don't want to push his limits. I respect those around me and don't want to entice them to sin.

It might be good if the public modesty of Christians evoked *more* accusations of prudishness. There should be nothing prudish, however, in the privacy of the marriage relationship.

Sexually Healthy Marriages

The fact that marriage is part of God's answer to those who cannot control their sexual passion is telling. (1 Cor. 7:2,9). Paul's teaching on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 immediately follows his teaching on God's call to flee sexual immorality. Marriage is not a magical cure for lust or sexual addictions. But it is a divinely given help.

For a married couple to live "decent and chaste lives" actually means to be sexually active. In God's own words: Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife..." 1 Cor. 7:3-5. The context makes clear that affection includes sex as well as emotional closeness. Here's a