

VIII. Sexual Immorality

An improper relationship with the opposite sex is probably the number one problem among teenage Christians. The increasing permissiveness of society has even entered into the Lord's church.

The strong sexual desire that is part of every human being is not sinful. It is a natural instinct of man placed there by the Creator for the good of mankind. However, with each natural, human desire God gives, He gives us also the responsibility to maintain control of it.

As with all matters studied in morality, we will examine human sexuality in the light of God's word. This lesson will show that God does not expect us to behave however we wish to fulfill these desires, but He has set limitations. Concerning sexual immorality, the apostle Paul states, "it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done," (Ephesians 5:12). The intention of this study is not to embarrass or offend the student but to frankly identify sinful behavior.

A. The Biblical Words Of Sexual Immorality

Let's define what we're talking about. It is the first four words in Paul's list of the deeds of the flesh:

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness...

1. Fornication [PORNEIA]

This word appears 26 times in the New Testament. Each time, the King James Version renders it "fornication." Some English translations use the phrase "sexual immorality." This may give a connotation too general; for example, viewing pornography can be considered sexual immorality, but it is not fornication. Fornication always involves improper sexual relations with others. J. H. Thayer offers the following definition of PORNEIA:

- 1) Illicit sexual intercourse
 - a. adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, etc.
 - b. sexual intercourse with close relatives;
 - c. sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman;
- 2) Metaphorically, the worship of idols
 - a. of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols.

The word "fornication" therefore includes every kind of unlawful sexual relations:

- Pre-marital sex (1 Corinthians 7:1, 2)
- Adultery, extra-marital sex (Matthew 19:9)
- Homosexuality (Romans 1:26-28)
- Harlotry and prostitution (1 Timothy 1:9, 10)
- Incest (1 Corinthians 5:1)
- Bestiality (Leviticus 20:15, 16)

Plainly stated, when sexual relations take place between two who are not husband-and-wife, that is fornication, and the Bible calls it sin. God's disdain for such immorality is seen in the fact that there are seven lists of evil in the writings of Paul; fornication is listed in five of them and is the first one mentioned in each case.

2. Adultery [MOICHEIA]

This is simply the special case of fornication involving married people, or as W. E. Vine puts it, "unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another." So far-reaching is this offense that a marriage bond can be broken that might have otherwise survived a lifetime.

3. Uncleanness [AKATHARSIA]

J. H. Thayer defines this as not only physical uncleanness but, in a moral sense, the impurity of lustful living completely given over to lewdness and the self-indulgent gratification of fleshly desires.

4. Lewdness [ASELGEIA]

Literally meaning "without restraint," Thayer defines this as unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence, and continues to add "unchaste handling of males and females."

B. Sexuality Is A Beautiful Thing

In former times, sex was considered shameful by some societies and to be engaged only for conception. This notion probably arose because of abuses, such as prostitution. However, the Bible shows that, in the proper circumstance, sex is an approved gift of God. Nevertheless, in improper circumstances, it is dirty.

1. Marriage is the proper place

A story is often told of a farmer who, outside in his garden, picks up a handful of soil from the ground. As he handles it, he can see the parts of sand, clay, and decomposing organic matter that comprises it along with the occasional earthworm or other bug. He brings it up to his nose and smells the life-supporting nutrients and knows he can grow vegetables in that soil. He then throws the soil back to the ground. That's where it belongs, and it is beautiful there in his garden. He would never take that handful of soil into the house and throw it on the kitchen table. It doesn't belong there. That would be dirty.

So it is with sexuality. The Bible teaches that marriage between a man and a woman is the proper place; sex is right and beautiful there. Outside of marriage, it is unclean. Consider these passages:

Proverbs 5:15-23

Hint to reader: he's not actually talking about water from cisterns and fountains.

Song of Solomon 5:1

Hebrews 13:4

Marriage is the only divinely appointed relationship where these desires may be gratified.

2. Modern theology

Modern-day preachers in false religion teach that the Bible does not condemn sex between unmarried couples but only condemns harlotry, incest, and adultery. Is this true? What does the Bible say? Read carefully these passages and note the following:

1 Corinthians 6:12-18

To begin, these verses condemn fornication in clear language, and fornication is not limited only to incest, harlotry, and adultery. Every reputable definition of that term includes pre-marital sex in its meaning. Read on...

1 Corinthians 7:2, 8, 9

If sex is lawful between unmarried couples, why would the apostle say in verse 2 that, in order to avoid fornication, a man should take a wife and a woman should take a husband? Again, if pre-marital sex is okay, why would he say to unmarried couples in verses 8 and 9 that they should get married to satisfy their burning desires?

False teachers want to distort the truth because it is not very enjoyable to tell people they are involved in sin. However, this is God's word, and the truth is the truth. Whether we want to accept it or not, that's just the way it is, and this is the standard by which we will be judged.

C. Love Is The Rule

The New Testament Greek language has at least four different words for love:

- AGAPE = Godly love; the love for strangers or enemies that always seeks their highest good.
- PHILEO = the love of close friendship and things familiar to us.
- STORGE = the natural love between family members.
- EROS = the love of romance between the sexes that arouses physical attraction.

The word EROS does not occur in the New Testament, but the concept of this passionate love does appear, as our study shows.

The word AGAPE has the deepest meaning of all. It defines the way God loves. This is sacrificial love and always puts others ahead of self. This love, which governs and controls all other kinds of love, is best described in 1 Corinthians 13. Note particularly these verses:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Let's consider the way AGAPE controls the behavior of EROS.

1. Love is kind

The Song Of Solomon most vividly describes the nature of physical love between a man and a woman. One of the strongest messages learned is about mutual admiration and friendship. Note the language of adoration and respect between them:

Song of Solomon 4:8-11

Song of Solomon 5:16

True love will never do anything to belittle another or put them to shame.

2. Love is patient

The Song Of Solomon teaches young lovers to wait until the proper time to fulfill these desires, indicated poetically by the repeating phrase, "Do not stir up love until it pleases."

Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4

The woman is described as a garden enclosed and filled with delicate flowers and fruits in the following verses:

Song of Solomon 4:12-16

The lovers do not rush in and stomp through the garden; this would damage the "tender grapes," (2:13) the things that are to be kept fresh and new. Note particularly the phrase "Awake, O north wind, ... That its spices may flow out." This suggests waiting until the proper time; you have to wait for the "north wind" to blow.

True love will never say anything to pressure or tempt another.

3. Love is not self-serving

The one who loves you the most will be the one who loves what is right like you do and will do everything in their power to help you get to heaven.

Song of Solomon 2:4-6

True love will never use another for selfish purposes or harm them.

4. Love is strong

So strong is the emotion of this love that it can cause significant side effects: our heart rate quickens, our palms get sweaty, our speech begins to stutter, and we get weak in the knees. No wonder she says, "I am lovesick:"

Song of Solomon 8:6, 7

True love will always stand and do the right thing.

D. The Wrong Way

1. Divine Design

God designed sex, and He ordained marriage, so He knows what is best for us. If we fulfill these desires according to God's law, we will find ourselves much happier in the end. It may be hard for young people to understand now how that could be, but if you will do it God's way, when you become older, you'll be glad you did with no regrets.

Ecclesiastes 12:1

Paul compares marriage to the relationship of Christ and His church. If Christ's relationship with the church is pure, then marriage is pure. Sex is a privilege of marriage the same as forgiveness is a privilege of being in the church.

Ephesians 5:21-33

2. What Is Lost?

What is lost when people engage in sexual relationships outside of marriage? Remember, once a deed has been done, there's no undoing it. You can repent and say you're sorry and be forgiven, but still there is the loss of something special. Your chastity is a gift you can give only once. A relationship is deepened and special when both parties have waited until marriage. The world may see this as foolish and old-fashioned, but from the beginning, we have established that is not our standard.

So what do you stand to lose?

- Self respect
- Respect for your partner
- A clear conscience
- Your reputation
- Your eternal salvation

3. What Is Missing?

There's a lot more to marriage than sex. If sex is engaged without marriage, all the other wonderful things God designed for you are missing:

1. It is not based on love but physical lust. If it were truly love, it could not be sin; love and sin are incompatible (1 John 5:3). Also, consider this, when the physical attractiveness begins to fade due to years or disease, the relationship will probably not endure.
2. True companionship is not enjoyed (Song of Solomon 6:3). There is no commitment in a relationship of convenience. Whenever one pleases, they may up and leave, and where will that leave you?
3. There is no genuine mutual concern (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). When each partner puts the other ahead of themselves, there is a contentment like no other. This selfless, sharing care is of divine origin.
4. Trust is missing (Proverbs 31:10). To know that the promises of the spouse are as unailing as the promises of God brings a peace no one else knows. There is no need for suspicion and no place for jealousy.
5. This is a false oneness (Genesis 2:18-25). "One flesh" suggests much more than sexual oneness. In fact, it is completely possible to be married, that is "one flesh," and be physically incapable of sexual intimacy due to an injury or deformity. Such a relationship would likely crumble if not based upon godliness. The flesh is the medium through which we experience life on this earth. To be "one flesh" means to share every aspect of this life: your hopes, your dreams, your goals, your desires, your plans, and your wants are one.
6. Confidence is lost (Proverbs 28:1). If you engage in random sex, you have to worry about venereal disease and unwanted pregnancy.

E. Practical Applications

Learning what the Bible teaches on this subject and putting it into practice every day are two entirely different things. When you are out on a date, for example, what can you do to help make sure you keep yourself pure? Here are some important things for young people to think about to help maintain control.

1. Be selective who you date.

This doesn't mean you have to view everyone you date as a candidate for marriage, but you should know something about their character. This is especially important if you date a non-Christian; they may not have the same moral standards as you or recognize the same limitations as you (1 Corinthians 15:33). Be careful about becoming involved in a serious, on-going relationship with a non-Christian who shows no interest in spiritual things. Ask yourself, "Is this someone who will help me get to heaven or hinder me?"

2. Be on guard during private times.

When you're on a date, there will be occasions when the two of you are all alone. Do not think that, because no one sees you, anything is different. We may hide these sins from others, but nothing is secret from God (Hebrews 4:13). Do not invite problems by planning a date where much of your time is spent in private. It is always easier to **stay** out of difficult situations than to **get** out.

3. Show your affection with moderation.

There's nothing wrong with hugging and kissing, but long sessions of this can easily get out of hand. The next step is inappropriate touching, or petting. Remember that the Bible warns against lewdness, which includes by definition "unchaste handling of males and females." Paul's instruction is to "flee fornication" (1 Corinthians 6:18), "flee also youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22), and "abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). This does not mean see how close you can get to doing it without actually doing it! Try kissing less and talking more with each other; you may learn something.

4. Don't deceive yourself.

There's different kinds of sexual activity. You may be asking yourself what exactly constitutes having sex? If you have to wonder about it, you have probably gone too far. Remember, sex with an adjective in front of it is still sex.

F. Thoughts And Questions For Discussion

1. What is the difference between fornication and adultery?
2. The Bible says that God provides the way of escape in every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). What if I feel like I just can't help myself?
3. If I'm engaged to another, isn't that like being married, since we've already given each other a pledge? What would then be wrong with beginning sexual activity?
4. Genesis 2:24 says, "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." What does it mean to be one flesh?