

What's the big deal about sex before marriage?

"Quick" and "easy" have got to be the two most popular words in our culture. But the most eye-catching for sure is "sex." Wherever human beings have lived, sex has been a pretty popular topic. What's different now is our media-culture. It has gone beyond ridiculous. What adults used to privately wink about is now omnipresent. Next time you are in the check-out line at your grocery store, look to see what is at the eye-level of your 5 and 6 year old children!

Adultery is still considered shameful. Betrayal of one's mate and marriage vows still resonates with our culture. But if the media is our guide, pre-marital sex is hardly taken more seriously than shaking hands. I'm being a little facetious, but really, the emotional suspense in movies used to build up to a kiss. Remember "The Sound of Music"? Now it is a bed scene.

Fornication is an ugly sounding word, but maybe it needs to be for our jaded ears. Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander." (Mt 15:19) Fornication ("porneia" in Greek) is any kind of sexually immoral practice, but usually describes those who are "sleeping around." That we use euphemisms such as "sleeping around" and "living together" and NOT the word fornication should alert us to our repressed awareness that such behavior is simply wrong.

"Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." (Rev 22:15) These jarring words are among the last things said in the Bible. Who spoke them? Jesus did. Fornication, having sex outside marriage, is a very serious sin, at the level of murder and idolatry and lying. That many people today live together before marriage does not change the fact that in God's sight it is still "living in sin."

But what is the big deal? Why would God be so strict about something that gives us such pleasure? Because far more is going on than just the exchange of genitalia. And we know it. Our bodies are to be temples of the Holy Spirit. We are to be "known" by God in the deepest way possible. Our



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inmost perceptions, every faint hovering of emotion, the thoughts, images, ideas, and memories stored inside us since the womb, and all our choices known (and experienced!) by God. There is no intimacy deeper than this. Yet, we are also given the privilege of deeply sharing our self with another human being—our spouse. We open our mind, our soul, and our body to this one other human being. Which is why, of course, divorce hurts so badly. That one other person we trusted to come "within" our temple has rejected us. Divorce cripples for the same reason that sex outside of marriage is forbidden—the sacredness of soul is violated. "One flesh" is more than just skin on skin. God forbids sex before marriage because that is best for us.

We so easily fall into the same temptation as Eve, secretly believing that God is withholding something good from us. But as with all His laws, God is seeking our good. I will never forget the sorrow of a student some years ago. She was sitting in my classroom, head on her desk, crying. "My boyfriend broke up with me," she said, sobbing. "And I gave him the most precious thing I had."

But there is another reason to refrain from sex before marriage. God is creating sons and daughters who will carry out His interests. We are being trained to reign with Jesus over this universe forever (Rev 22:5). Part of that training includes the mastery of our desires. We all have to learn to contain ourselves. The longing to merge with another person is at the core of sexual desire. But "completeness" only comes from God. No human being can fill in our missing parts. Sexual embrace

seems to fill that void and heal the soul, but it doesn't. Only God "restoreth my soul." Our culture treats sex as if it were an inalienable right. The myth that we must have sex in order to be fulfilled is just silly. Lots and lots of people on this planet are not living "sexually fulfilled" lives. So what? Sex is not a human need. A strong desire yes, but a need? Food, water, and sleep are needs. But not sex.

"Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you..." (1 Cor 6:9) My own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in the throes of deciding whether homosexually oriented people having sex with one another, otherwise qualified, can still be ordained as ministers. The assumption is that to ask homosexual (or heterosexual) persons to refrain from sex would somehow do violence to them as persons. It won't. Whether one has same-sex desires or other-sex desires is beside the point. God has called us to live self-controlled lives. Human beings are not dogs. We can help ourselves.

Now to those burdened with guilt over sexual sin. In the Gospels, Jesus was always tender with those who sinned sexually. To a woman caught in adultery, He said, "Woman, does no one condemn you? Then neither do I. Go and sin no more." (John 8:11)

Our Lord offers pardon and rejuvenation of inner desires. If we desire to walk in sexual faithfulness, He will teach us how to do so. It will not be easy or quick, but it will happen. If we fall we get back up. We confess our sin, we ask Jesus for forgiveness, we thank Him for that forgiveness, and then we continue to follow after Him. "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'— and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Ps 32:5)

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