

## **Sex, Sin And Marriage**

**by Staff**

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Adultery, fornication and other forms of sexual immorality have been in the news a lot lately. The military in particular is undergoing a top-to-bottom review of its sexual policies because of various misdeeds of its officers and troops. From the lowest to the highest offices in the land, marital infidelity and sexual improprieties are the buzzwords.

Tabloids scream the latest "love triangle" discovered. Magazines contest each other to picture the cover girl with the least covering. Headlines tease readers with articles about sex. Within their pages sex sins of every stripe come out of the closet.

Whether its movies, the Internet, bars, parties, homosexual activities, parades or whatever, sex is the vehicle that attracts interest. It has even encroached into children's cartoons, books, magazines and videos!

"Living in sin" is now par for the course. People refer, not to husbands or wives, but to "significant others." They speak of "satellite relationships" rather than affairs. Perversions have been downgraded to "personal sexual expressions." What was once shameful is now acceptable.

Why is sex promoted so extensively? Because sin is pleasurable, and sex sins are particularly so. Moses chose to forego the "passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25) for a greater ultimate reward and pleasure. Unaware of their glorious potential, the people of this world are busy "serving various lusts and pleasures" (Titus 3:3).

Though we may not engage in sex sins, this barrage of innuendo and flagrant sensuality can leave us very jaded. Such an assault can deaden our resistance. We can find ourselves losing sight of God's purpose for the seventh commandment and marriage. If we fail to resist, we will begin to overlook how despicable *all* sex sins are to God and allow this precious gift—sex—to be cheapened.

### **The Seventh Commandment's Scope**

"You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14) is not limited to sex outside of marriage. God commands us to abstain from all sexual immorality, including premarital sex (fornication), homosexuality, incest, voyeurism, bestiality, public nudity and much more (see Leviticus 18 and 20). In the New Testament, Paul adds licentiousness, uncleanness and lewdness (Ephesians 4:19), which largely deal with liberal attitudes towards sexual matters.

Men seem to "get away" with adultery while unfaithful women are considered tramps. This double standard is ancient. In John 8:3-11, a crowd was ready to stone a woman caught "in the very act," but where was the adulterous man? God's Word, however, deals with both sexes equally.

It does not take sexual sin lightly either. Leviticus 20:10 commands death for both participants for adultery, as well as for sodomy and homosexuality (verse 13). Paul reminds us that God killed

twenty-three thousand Israelites in one day for sex sins (I Corinthians 10:8). In Abraham's day God destroyed five entire cities by fire for their aberrant sex practices. God sent the Israelites and Jews into captivity for immorality, among other reasons.

Jesus struck the heart of the matter in His Sermon on the Mount. Christians must not even lust after another—fantasizing or committing sex with them mentally (Matthew 5:27-28). Nowadays, many psychiatrists, psychologists and counselors actually advise people to fantasize, or perhaps even have a "little fling." Advertisements and fashions all play to the lust of the flesh, making it increasingly more difficult to obey Jesus' command. Teens sometimes scorn their peers if they are still virgins by fourteen. This topsy-turvy world has completely lost its understanding of this commandment.

Much like our big cities today, ancient Corinth was filled with sexual temptations. Paul advised the brethren there to "*flee* sexual immorality" (I Corinthians 6:18). Too often we flee, yet leave a forwarding address! It is unwise to hang around people, places or situations that tempt us into sex sins (Proverbs 5:3-14; Genesis 39:7-12). When we flirt with temptation, we can end up as an ox going to slaughter (Proverbs 7:6-27).

Why should we flee temptations? Revelation 21:8 states that God will sentence the sexually immoral to the Lake of Fire, right along with murderers, idolaters, liars and other unrepentant sinners. Paul adds

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. (I Corinthians 6:9-10)

### **Holy Purpose of Marriage**

If we recall the holy purpose of marriage, we can understand why it is so important to resist and overcome sex sins. We need to look at the seventh commandment from the viewpoint of God's holiness and the holy relationship that He intends a marriage to be. Beyond that, we need to see this in light of the Kingdom of God and the church's marriage to Christ.

When God created the world and all in it, He fashioned Adam and Eve in His image and after His likeness (Genesis 1:26). "Image," some commentators say, may refer more to character than to appearance. Thus, creating people after His likeness by divine fiat could be done instantly (Genesis 5:1; James 3:9), but creating them in His image takes time.

Jesus Christ was the perfect image of His Father (Hebrews 1:1-3). He had the Father's character and holiness. He knew His Father's purpose intimately and followed His will perfectly. When asked to show the Father to the disciples, Jesus replied, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

It should be our goal to be able to reveal the Father by how we live our lives. Born again by His incorruptible seed (I Peter 1:23), we are to grow into full maturity by conforming to Christ's image day by day (Romans 8:29; II Corinthians 3:18). When we are resurrected or changed, we will be just like God Himself (I John 3:2). Jesus must marry a wife from the same kind as Himself. His wife must therefore be composed of people who "grow in the grace and knowledge" of Christ and are changed to immortality and incorruption at His return.

Everything about a godly husband-wife marriage should "speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). *We should be picturing in our marriages the holy union between God's Son and His bride made perfect!* Men should love their wives "as Christ loved the church," giving themselves for them and presenting them to themselves (verses 25-27). Then husbands should nourish and cherish their wives, "as the Lord [does] the church" (verse 29). Adultery, fornication, pornography, sodomy and other perversions prevent these things from happening—at least until repentance occurs! Similarly, a wife who drags her marriage through the same mire is not submitting exclusively to her husband, and certainly not "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22).

These principles apply as much to women as to men. If a wife truly viewed her husband as if he were Jesus Himself, how would she act? How faithful and responsive would she be? If a husband truly regarded His wife as Jesus does the church, how patient, faithful, loving, exclusive, nourishing and giving would he be?

If we can truly grasp the *meaning* of marriage, we will view it and the seventh commandment from a holy perspective and not just as another "thou shalt not." Movies, television sitcoms, jokes and modern lifestyles all cheapen this most special relationship. God's saints should derive no pleasure from watching sinners sin. If His Spirit is strong in us, we should find no joy in entertainment that depicts sexual infidelity or perversion. Though much of it is depicted as comedic, it is no laughing matter to God, nor should it be to those filled with His Spirit.

God is holy, and He has called us to be holy. He desires our marriages to picture the relationship of Jesus and the church. Thus, Paul writes, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4). He uses the word *koite* for "bed," referring to intercourse within marriage and meaning that we need to keep it unpolluted, free from stain, sacred and pure.

When that happens, the fruit of that union—children—are also holy (I Corinthians 7:14). God seeks godly offspring (Malachi 2:15), so He warns us not to deal treacherously in our marriages. A chief cause of marital problems and divorce is infidelity or the results of it, whether actual or fantasized.

We should view our spouse as set apart, not *just as* a sex toy. I Thessalonians 4:4-5 advises each of us to learn "how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God." This does not remove the tremendous pleasure, fun, joy, and satisfaction from marriage! God created men and women in such a way that in marriage they can bond to each other as one flesh, sharing the fullness of emotions and intimacy.

### **Presenting Our Mates To Ourselves**

God first created Adam from the dust of the ground, and he came to life when God personally breathed life into him (Genesis 2:7), something He did not do to the animals. Most likely, He created Adam outside the Garden of Eden and put him there later (verse 8) to be its caretaker, making sure the man had a job before he married. Later that day, God took one of Adam's ribs and from it *built* a woman, "and He brought [or presented] her to [Adam] the man" (verses 21-22). In the same way, Christ *presents* His holy bride, the church, to Himself (Ephesians 5:27).

Just as we are part of Christ's body, Eve was literally part of Adam's body. Adam *gave of himself* to have a wife, just as Christ "loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). In the marriage ceremony that immediately followed, Adam acknowledged her as "bone of my bones and

flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). One reason for this was to depict that man and wife are to become one flesh (verse 24), bonded by love.

All of this happened in a gorgeous garden which name means "delight." God meant married life to be delightful. They were both naked with no reason to be ashamed (verse 25). After the wedding, on the eve of the Sabbath, God instructed them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). This shows sex in marriage is honorable, beautiful, delightful and holy. God judged "everything He had made, and indeed it was very good" (verse 31).

Notice, however, that God did not create Eve, Mary, Jane and Susan for Adam. God presented just Eve to Adam, and only to her could he give his affections. The ideal is one husband loving one wife. We, too, must present our mates *exclusively* to ourselves. Sex sins violate this principle.

Science has found that the human mind cannot distinguish between an actual experience and a carefully detailed imaginary one. World-class athletes use this knowledge to train themselves to win in their particular sport. This is why Jesus says it is adulterous even to lust after another. When one imagines sexual activities with another in detail, the mind records that fantasy as a real event! Fantasizing (lust) is sin because the mind registers it as actual adultery!

It becomes easier to repeat an act if one has already done it once. Evil in the heart eventually comes out as sin. When adultery occurs, a person presents someone else other than his spouse to himself. He has ripped apart his one-body/one-flesh marriage and joined himself to another. Lust is **not** a victimless crime! The husband, the wife and the marriage are the victims!

Paul writes, "He who is joined to a harlot [or anyone other than his spouse] is *one body* with her" (I Corinthians 6:16). Adultery creates a second one-body/one-flesh bond in opposition to the marriage. This will inflict severe damage upon the marriage relationship. The apostle says such sexual sins hurt so much because they are "sins against [our] own body" (verse 18).

Paul comes to his primary point in verses 19-20: *We are not our own!* God bought us at an incredibly high cost, the blood of our Master, and thus He commands us to "glorify God in your body and in your spirit," both of which are His! God owns us completely!

The import of this is staggering! When we commit sex sins—even in our minds—we have first become unfaithful to God! When we break the seventh commandment, *we show infidelity to God!* Yes, it shows infidelity to the wronged spouse, but it all begins with unfaithfulness to God.

The road to adultery starts when we become willing to break the vows we made to God at our baptism. We promised then that we would honor and obey Him exclusively and faithfully, accepting Him as our Savior, Master and soon-coming King and Husband. When we are willing to walk away from the commands He gives us about sex and marriage, we begin to walk into the arms of adultery. Physical adultery starts with spiritual adultery!

If an adulterer desires to repent, he must first acknowledge that he has sinned against God. King David, in his moving prayer of repentance after the murder of Uriah and adultery with Bathsheba, cries out, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:4). Did he not also sin against Uriah, Bathsheba, the nation, his wives and his children? Of course! But ultimately, his sin was against God! *When we are faithful to God and our covenant with Him, we will not commit sex sins.*

## **Overcoming Sex Sin**

Sexual immorality is certainly damaging to our lives and to our marriages. It stabs a knife into the heart of the innocent victims—the mate and the children. It totally shatters marital trust, and it takes a very forgiving person even to try to rebuild it. Many find it next to impossible to forgive this sin, as it undermines the very foundations of a marriage.

Is all lost after sex sins?

Paul warns the Corinthians that the sexually immoral would not inherit God's Kingdom. He knew many of them had participated in the immorality that characterized Corinth. Were they doomed? Notice his hopeful next words:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (I Corinthians 6:11)

If anyone has committed sex sins, he can seek and receive forgiveness!

Overcoming any sin starts with recognizing we are sinners and need forgiveness. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it or its sinners, "but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). If we repentantly acknowledge our sins and weaknesses, God will hear, forgive and accept us. Jesus came to heal and to call sinners—all of us—to repentance.

In this is the next step: Sexually immoral people can—and must—change. We must certainly stop feeding the sin. What goes into the mind comes out in actions; garbage in, garbage out or holiness in, holiness out. Each of us has this choice. If we avoid the temptations, we have a good chance of kicking sinful habits.

## **Christ's Example**

How did our Savior deal with repentant sex sinners? Many expect Him to be harsh and judgmental, but that is just the opposite of His recorded encounters with them. Jesus does not whitewash sex sinners even from His own genealogy! Because of their repentance, He was not ashamed to have them listed.

His genealogy includes several men and women guilty of sex sins, a few of them quite awful sins. Judah "begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar" who posed as a prostitute (Matthew 1:3; Genesis 38). Rahab (Matthew 1:5) was a harlot, but Hebrews 11 also lists her as a heroine of faith. David appears along with Bathsheba, "who had been the wife of Uriah" (Matthew 1:6; II Samuel 11). Solomon (Matthew 1:7), certainly not known for his restraint, and several of his heirs were no angels. In fact, one could say that most of those listed in the lineage broke the seventh commandment in one form or another!

The Samaritan woman at the well was living in sin, after having had five husbands (John 4:17-18), yet Jesus chose to reveal Himself as the Messiah to her first out of all the people of her city! He certainly did not shun such people as below Him. Christ even used her to spread the word about Himself to many others (verses 39-42).

Luke 7:36-50 tells the story a woman of ill repute who came to her Savior weeping and repentant. She humbly knelt and washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Then she kissed His feet and anointed them with fragrant oil. In contrast to Christ's gentle attitude, the host of the occasion was appalled that He would even allow her to touch Him. The story shows how God views us if we show repentance after a sex sin. Jesus simply says to her, "Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (verses 48, 50).

We can learn from the way Jesus behaved when the scribes and Pharisees brought before him a woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8:1-8). To the crowd He said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (verse 7). The only one without sin there was the only One without a stone in His hand. He gently told her that *He did not condemn her*, but firmly urged her to "go and sin no more" (verse 11). Undoubtedly, she had consequences to deal with resulting from her adultery, but sin's spiritual penalty had been forgiven.

We must all learn to forgive those who have committed sex sins and let them start a new life. If we are Christ's, we are a new creation (II Corinthians 5:17), and we must not judge each other based on what we were. Past is past, dead and buried. God says he removes our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12); His children should do no less for each other.

Some have repented of a sex sin and then done it again. Is that not true of many of our sins? Overcoming sin is a lifelong process. He who taught to forgive "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18: 21-22) will forgive us when we come repentantly before His throne of grace. Though we stumble again over the same sin, we must return to our merciful God and again sally into the fight against it.

Paul recognizes that "nothing good dwells" in the flesh (Romans 7:18). He writes that there were times he found himself doing the very things he hated (verse 19). He cries out, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (verse 24). He answers this question in the next verse: "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jude commends us "to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and *to present you faultless before the presence of His glory* with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Though we are imperfect and sinful, if we abide in Christ, we will overcome, even surrounded as we are by temptations and sensuality. Regardless of our past, God has called us to become the pure, spotless bride of His Son (Ephesians 5:27). We will be without blemish, for Christ is cleansing and purifying us (verse 26). He will present us to Himself as a chaste virgin (Revelation 14:4; 19:8)!

Let us so conduct our marriages, keeping them holy and clean. By doing so, we will glorify God and produce righteous fruit toward His Kingdom!