

Dream a New Dream About Sex

Sexuality and the Glory of God



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Introduction

The topic of human sexuality is one which will always draw some pretty intense interest from people. Nothing this powerful and compelling could ever be ignored. Yet discussions of sex can either be strictly behaviorist, do or don't do this or that, or technical, here is how you do this or that, or in some circles no substantive discussion is had at all. In the latter, people usually just learn through the cultural flows of friends, porn, and all manner of pop cultural expressions. Here I want to do something a bit different. I want to ask some questions and then beg us to be willing to dream new dreams about sex. To have dreams different than those of our culture, even more robust than much of what may be talked about in some Christian communities. In our discussion we will state clearly that sex is a beautiful, wonderful and pleasurable gift that God has made. It is God who has made our bodies and He made all these things for His purposes. His vision for sex is a great dream, but culturally we are living a bit of a sexual nightmare. Before we jump into a theological vision for sexuality, I want to point out a few reasons why we need a new dream about sex.

Why a New Dream?

I grew up as a child of the 1980s and early 1990s. This was an interesting decade as it was the time in which AIDS hit the fan. The free love cultural revolution of the 1960s

in America and the porno revolution of the 1970s fueled by technological innovations such as the VCR ran into a disease that simply killed people. This led to many strange pop cultural phenomena where pop icons Salt and Peppa and George Michael wanted to “Talk about Sex.” The former asked us to “talk about all the good things and the bad things that may be,” the latter gave us some high morality in teaching us “sex is natural, sex is fun, sex is best when it’s one-on-one.” Thanks George.

Today our culture is a bit sex-crazed and some of the underground consequences are kept quietly out of view. It is one thing to say that teen girls would rather be “sexy than smart,”¹ it is quite another thing to pull back the veils on pornography, sex addiction, disease and the abuse of women. What follows are some statistics about the state of sexuality in America. Statistics can be a bit numbing, yet when scanning these numbers, remember that real lives are involved.

Pornography Industry Statistics²

Size of the Industry (\$97.0 billion world-wide - \$13.3 billion U.S.)

- The worldwide pornography industry is larger than the revenues of the top technology companies combined: Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo!, Apple, Netflix and EarthLink.

- U.S. porn revenue exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC (\$6.2 billion).
- Child pornography generates \$3 billion annually.



Internet Porn Statistics

- Pornographic websites - \$4.2 million (12% of total websites), Pornographic pages - \$420 million, Daily pornographic search engine requests - \$68 million (25% of total search engine requests) Daily pornographic emails - 2.5 billion (8% of total emails)
- Average daily pornographic emails/user—4.5 per Internet user, monthly pornographic downloads (peer-to-peer) - 1.5 billion (35%

of all downloads), daily Gnutella “child pornography” requests - 116 thousand, websites offering illegal child pornography—100 thousand.

Men and Porn

- Men *admitting* to accessing pornography at work - 20%, U.S. adults who regularly visit Internet pornography websites - 40 million. Christians who said pornography

is a major problem in their home - 47%. Adults admitting to Internet sexual **addiction** - 10% (29 million). Breakdown of male/female visitors to pornography sites - 72% male; 28% female.

Women and Porn

- Percentage of women who admit to accessing pornography at work - 13%.
Percentage of women who keep their cyber activities secret - 70%. The number of women who struggle with pornography addiction – 17%. Women, far more than men, are likely to act out their behaviors in real life, such as having multiple partners, casual sex, or affairs. Women favor chat rooms 2X more than men. Almost 1 of 3 visitors to all adult websites are women. 9.4 million women access adult websites each month.

In addition to the rapid growth and influence of pornography in our world, there are other offshoots of a sexualized culture. Abuse, disease and the breakdown of families has attended the sexual revolutions of the last several decades.

Sexual Abuse

- Thank God! Since 1993, rape/sexual assault has fallen by over 69%.
- However, every two and a half minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted. One in six American women are victims of sexual assault and

one in 33 men. In 2004-2005, there were an average annual 200,780 victims of rape, attempted rape or sexual assault. About 44% of rape victims are under age 18, and 80% are under age 30.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

STDs in America

- HPV (genital warts) - Approximately 20 million people are currently infected with HPV. At least 50% of sexually active men and women acquire genital HPV infection at some point in their lives. By age 50, at least 80% of women will have acquired genital HPV infection. About 6.2 million Americans get a new genital HPV infection each year.³
- HIV/AIDS – At the end of 2003, an estimated 1,039,000 to 1,185,000 persons in the United States were living with HIV/AIDS, with 24-27% undiagnosed and unaware of their HIV infection.⁴
- Herpes – Results of a nationally representative study show that genital herpes infection is common in the United States. Nationwide, at least 45 million people ages 12 and older, or one out of five adolescents and adults, have had genital HSV infection. Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, the number of Americans with

genital herpes infection increased 30 percent. Genital HSV-2 infection is more common in women (approximately one out of four women) than in men (almost one out of five). This may be due to male-to-female transmissions being more likely than female-to-male transmission.⁵

Counsel on “Protection”⁶

- HPV (genital warts) – Studies have not confirmed that male latex condoms prevent transmission of HPV itself, but results do suggest that condom use may reduce the risk of developing diseases linked to HPV, such as genital warts and cervical cancer.
- HIV/AIDS – People should either abstain from having sex or use male latex condoms or female polyurethane condoms, which may offer partial protection, during oral, anal, or vaginal sex.
- Herpes – Between outbreaks, using male latex condoms during sexual intercourse may offer some protection from the virus.



Fatherlessness

- Twenty-four million children (34% of all kids) live without their biological father. The number of children living with only their mothers and no father figure grew from just over five million in 1960 to over 16.6 million today. About 40% of children who live in fatherless households have not seen their fathers in at least a year. 50% of children who do not live with their fathers have never stepped foot in their father's home. 1.3 million children were born out of wedlock in 1998. This represents 33% of all births. Violent criminals are overwhelmingly males who grew up without fathers. The best predictor of crime in a community is the percentage of absent father households. Between 1981 and 1998, the percentage of children living with only one parent grew from 19% to over 27%.⁷
- For all the social consequences of fatherlessness please see *The Father Factor*—a research summary from the National Fatherhood Initiative.⁸

Family

- 40-50 % of all first marriages end in divorce—many within the first five years.

These current realities of our culture are in no way geographically unique or historically outstanding. In fact, the Greco-Roman world in which the church was birthed was

as sexually freaky as any culture today. In fact, in the ancient city of Corinth an early church leader had to rebuke a community for their toleration of a young man having sex with his step mom (1 Corinthians 5:2). So what counsel do we receive today in our culture as regards to sexuality? We still have cultural mores which define the limits of acceptable behavior. Let's look quickly at what the world offers to us today in terms of guidance in regards to sex—a look at Sex Ed 101 today.

Contemporary Sexual Values

The rules of the sexual game are pretty clear, though the terms are perilously difficult to define. If I were to distill the message of our culture about sex into a simple rule it would orbit around three terms: **consent, age, do no harm**. *Consent* means that the two individuals must freely agree to the sexual activity. Of course defining consent in states of intoxication with drugs and alcohol has made this definition so unclear that it has become the discussion of the legal community. Second, the word *age* refers to the reality that for people to have *consensual* sex those persons should be of a certain age to make a mature decision. Though the age varies between states in America (the range is between 14-18, over half setting the age at 16), most states still maintain laws which outlaw consensual sex with a minor.⁹ Finally, *do no harm* means don't hurt anyone—as best as you understand hurting people.

Now, I am 100% in agreement with consent, age, do no harm. Yet these guidelines alone fall so far short of any sort of clarity or sufficient understanding of sexuality. Additionally, these terms are so difficult to define that we now have all manner of cultural confusion. There have arisen colloquial phrases like “no, means no!” as young men apparently do not get the message. We even must clarify that “a drunk yes, could sometimes mean no” which leads to all manner of complications and perplexity. Additionally, age is often winked at as adolescent sexual exploration is encouraged and sometimes empowered in the name of safer sex. Sexual violence remains a serious problem and harm to the soul cannot be measured in terms of bruises. Yet as I look at this view of morality it also falls short of being useful in ruling out or even defining sexual perversion—taking something intended for one purpose and using it for another. Let me illustrate.

If all we are left with as a society is consent, age, and do no harm, where will we go as a culture obsessed with its sexual exploits? I think just about anywhere. In a review of the book *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality* by Midas Dekkers, Peter Singer, chair of the ethics department at Princeton University echoed the following view: *Singer stated that “mutually satisfying activities” of a sexual nature may sometimes occur between humans and animals.*¹⁰ No one wakes up one day and walks out to have sex with a chicken or dog, this happens when the purposes for sex are lost or erased in our cultural memory.

You see when we tell ourselves that there is no design or purpose to our sexuality other than personal pleasure, all manner of perverted dreams will come to fruition. We will use one another and be left with broken bodies, fractured souls and hearts unable to connect in true intimate relationships. This is a culture which is now seeing the proliferation of child pornography, an organization known as the North American Man Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) and a prominent professor winking at bestiality.

Now you may be thinking, I am not going for the cows and the chickens. You may simply be struggling to keep your pants on during the weekend. Or you may be heavily into porn and don't know how to get out; I understand this. I simply want you to see the logical bankruptcy of this world's views of sexuality. My contention is that it is time for a new dream about sex and our dream will begin with a few questions. They will be questions which deal with the ontology of sex rather than loosely defined rules. Here are my questions:

- What is sex for?
- What role does it play in relationship to God?

In this discussion I do not want to just give a practical “how to” session about mustering up some self-control to quit doing stuff you don't want to be doing. Rather, I pray,

a shifting in our worldview so that our understanding of sex becomes full orbed and its right connection to God's purposes restored.

Christian Discussions of Sex

Historically, Christian discussions of sex have been a bit repressive and moribund. There are many reasons for this. The rather negative view of the body by Platonic and Neo Platonic philosophy which was common among intellectuals in the early church might come to mind. Yet I think one figure is responsible for much of our historical dialogue about sexuality in the church. This person is none other than the massively influential bishop-theologian St. Augustine of Hippo. Augustine's relationship and subsequent response to sexuality is more understandable in light of his own story. Here was a man who was bound in lust and promiscuity before becoming a Christian. After his conversion to Jesus, being so delivered from his former illicit lifestyle, he swung the pendulum too far and went on to say that literally all sexual passion was evil, a result of the fall. If you want to read some of his treatments of the topic you can still read his views today.¹¹ Yet the church has been hard on sexuality for another reason as well; the problems which arise from uncontrolled lust are serious so they cannot be handled lightly. Take for instance the words of Jesus himself in the fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel:

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Serious words to consider; sex is no game and the passions of our hearts must be brought under the lordship of God. Yet so often the Church's dialogue on sex is simply *behaviorist*—our discussions center mainly on what we should or should not do. Rather than focusing on what sex is, what it is for, how it is made good and wonderful by God, we simply make some rules and create campaigns for our teenagers. When I first became a follower of Christ the message I heard loud and clear was simply: **Stop, Don't do it, Get married, then Do it.**



This was never enough for me as I had bigger questions; I wanted to have my heart and mind transformed to think differently about sexuality rather than just stop for a while and resume when married. Most of you will be married at some point in your life—though some may not. Some of you are newly married now; some of you desire to be married yesterday. So no matter what stage of life you find yourself in I want us to probe a bit deeper into the theological moorings of sexuality and ask the simple question: Why Sex?

A Strange Question – Why Sex?

This first question *Why Sex at All* isn't often asked. I mean, we are sexual creatures, and that is just the way it is, so why ask why? My contention is that if we do not start with this question we will miss God in our view and participation in our sexuality. We cannot treat sex as if God is embarrassed about it. After all, God made sex, He made it good, He made it feel good and He made it for His purposes. One of the foundational biblical truths about God is that He is our creator and as such His design of our sexuality is not without purpose. He could have made us organisms that reproduce differently. We could be budding creatures like the hydra or dividing organisms like amoebas. Now it seems a bit sci-fi weird to imagine kids popping off of your head, but it is logically possible that God could have done it that way. Yet He made us sexual, where male and female bodies were made for one another and God's purposes. It is in

these purposes we begin our answer to the question “why?”

Purposes of Sex

Procreation – Separating Sex and Babies

I know it may seem silly to bring up and perhaps appear obvious but in our day it needs to be stated that God did indeed create sex and babies to be coupled together. The statement “we are pregnant” was never meant to carry the negative connotation that accompanies it so many times in our day. Here is the account in the Book of Genesis in Scripture.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

- Genesis 1:28

So God says to the first human beings: “Have sex, make babies, have dominion with me.” Now, I’m not saying you need to have 19 kids, live on the side of a mountain in Idaho, but we cannot separate sexuality and procreation. In our day there is a strong effort to separate sex and the responsibility of children. The strong desire to have sex and not have to deal with kids has created quite a strange cultural phenomenon and we have

created language to describe it. We speak of “unwanted” pregnancies, abortion as planning for parenthood, unwed parents and single parenthood. In this world children are not always seen as gifts and then treated accordingly. Motherhood is devalued and fathering is abdicated among males who will not act like men. This is the offspring of our selfish sexual ethic. We need to embrace the truth that God has placed sex and responsibility together. He has made the sexual union between husband and wife one that is designed to produce and raise children. This is a good thing in every sense of the word. We have been deceived to think otherwise.

Unification – Intimacy, Complementary Nature

Sexuality is also a great gift of God which unites men and women in intimacy as we are designed to complement one another in both body and soul. We need to see quite clearly that males and females have been made differently at all levels and that our relationships are designed to be one of balance. Our bodies reflect this in their design and our natures long to be united with an “other” that is not the same as ourselves. Ironically, even homosexual relationships default back to this as many times partners mirror male/female roles within the relationship. God has given sexuality a unifying power that is to be one of self-giving intimacy, not self-seeking self-gratification. A unity within difference is God’s design.

In so defining marriage, we see that God desired a trusting intimacy to be reflected. Too often sexuality is filled with shame and violence and does not bind together but merely represents the use of bodies in an act of pleasure. Yet shame is not God's design. Genesis 2:24-25 describes this for us.

*²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and **were not ashamed**. - Genesis 2:24-25*

It is a great sadness that sex, even in marriage, can lack intimacy and trusting relationship. When sex is used outside of intimate unity it will be a shallow, self-serving act which distorts its purpose in our lives. It can leave us feeling quite lonely, empty and confused. I speak from personal experience on this one. God's plan was to have sexuality quite literally join a man and wife together in a context of trust and commitment. It is a beautiful purpose that is a great blessing to a committed marriage relationship.

Recreation – Enjoyment of the Creature

The selfish pursuit of pleasure is much different than a mutually submitted, self-giving relationship in which sex is enjoyed. Can someone say "Thank you Jesus!" that God made sex an intoxicatingly pleasurable gift to His creation? We must not forget that the

designer of sex designed its pleasure as well. Husbands and wives can find great refuge and enjoyment in one another's love. The Old Testament book, *The Song of Solomon*, gives a beautiful illustration of the joys of marital love. It isn't freaky to enjoy the marriage bed with creativity, joy, passion and freedom. Men and women do not have to be uptight when God has brought them together. Exploring the joys of sex in marriage is one of the delights that trust can foster. God tells His children—"Yeah, I made this, go ahead and play." God is not embarrassed by orgasms; in fact, He made them. But as *Song of Solomon* teaches—patience is needed: *I adjure you...that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.* (Song of Solomon 8:4). This is the proper time, place and relational context for pleasure, but God indeed made this thing for the enjoyment of His creatures.

One note of encouragement and warning to us all about being single is needed. Sex is not God, nor is it the highest pleasure in the universe. A person is not being denied joy by God because of singleness and chastity—such a person has more time and energy to focus on the greatest pleasure of God Himself. To say otherwise gives in to the idolatry of our culture that says there is no happiness without sex. It is interesting to see that early Christians thought chastity a better way towards spiritual joys. The monastery and the convent perhaps went overboard with this principle but our disdain for chastity today is an overreach in the opposite direction. Yes, sex is made for the pleasure of married couples, but it is not the highest pleasure for married or single people—God is.

So here is where we have come so far. First, sex is about procreation and making babies—we all didn't come from the stork you know. Second, sex is about unification, bringing a man and woman together in deep intimacy and relationship. Third, sex was made by God for the joy and pleasure of His creatures. Yet none of these gets to what I think is the central purpose for which God created sex...namely, sex is about God. All things have been made by Him and for Him and whatever we do we are to do it all for the glory of God. The Scriptures are clear about this. So ultimately sex is about glory—not the glory of sex, but for the understanding of and the worship of God Himself. Shall we blow up some of our preconceived categories about sexuality?

Glorification – God can be Seen and Savored and Known as Supreme in Sex

The most glorious things in the world are those which people so often have worshiped as gods. If you look at the history of man-made religions you will find the “gods” located around the heavenly bodies and the fertility of our own bodies. There are sun gods, moon gods and many gods which derive their glories from the vastness of the heavens. Additionally there are gods and goddesses of love and fertility where sexuality, sacred prostitution and sexual rituals abound.¹² The Scriptures teach us in Romans 1 that human beings will worship the creation rather than the creator and this temptation lands on the most beautiful of things.

The mistake is made when the human heart takes a good thing and turns it into an

ultimate thing and thus begins to worship it. This is true with sexuality as many cultures have made sex a substitute for God. Cultures that see sex as the ultimate thing (where the function god is Eros) will become increasingly perverted and people will be abused. Yet the urge to see sex and worship as somehow related is not altogether a bad thing. In fact, sex has been made by God to be a pointer to Him, but never a replacement for Him. Peter Kreeft, a philosopher from Boston College, makes this excellent observation about the relationship between God and sex.

Sex is like religion not only because it is objectively holy in itself but also because it gives us subjectively a foretaste of heaven, of the self-forgetting, self-transcending, self-giving that is what our deepest hearts are designed for, long for and will not be satisfied until they have, because we are made in God's own image and this self-giving constitutes the inner life of the Trinity.¹³

Don't miss this. The nature of the relationships of the Trinity are foreshadowed or echoed in sex. Sex is made to reflect the glory of God. So if you think that sex is simply about getting off, having pleasure, freaking around, even just to show one another love, we will miss the central purpose for which God created sex.

If sex is ultimately a pointer to who God is, we will need a new vocabulary in order to discuss these realities. Any time you want to discuss some subject it will likely have a

certain vocabulary you must learn to be conversant with the matter. The world of finance has a vocabulary which discusses yields, interest rates and perhaps hedge funds. The musician has a vocabulary which includes notes, instrumentation, charts, etc. Football players, coaches and fans have a vocabulary which includes first downs, penalties and touchdowns. If you do not have the vocabulary you are an outsider in gaining true understanding. So let's acquire some new words to talk about God and sex.

A Biblical Vocabulary of Sex

I realized that some of the vocabulary I learned as a teenager in locker rooms wasn't going to help me in discussing God and sex, so what follows is a few words we need to understand in order to grasp this relationship. The terms are interconnected and somewhat built on one another so please read about covenants and marriage before jumping down to read about immorality.

Covenant

Perhaps the most central idea to understanding God's relationship to sexuality is a term many do not usually associate with sex. The term covenant is not used as much in today's vernacular so I want to take a bit of time to define this well for us. First, a covenant can be defined as a committed relationship pledged with a **promise** and sealed with a **sign**. In other words, a covenant involves two parties that are promised to one another

with certain conditions stipulating faithful relationship. Additionally, there is an external, real world sign which indicates that the covenant exists between the parties. In the Old Testament covenants were made by God with a people who were to be His very own. Let me use one of the covenants in the Old Testament¹⁴ to illustrate this idea of promise and sign. In the Book of Genesis, God makes a covenant with a man named Abraham which involved both a promise and a sign. God's covenant promises to him are described in Chapter 12 and then confirmed in Chapter 15 with a rather strange vision.

Promise

In Genesis God promises Abraham several things. First, we see God promise to bless the whole world through the offspring of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and to make his descendants as numerable as the stars (Genesis 15:1-6). Additionally, He promises to give his people a land and to bless those who bless them and curse those who curse them. After the promise, God gives Abraham the following dream/vision in the latter part of Chapter 15. It is a bit strange for the contemporary reader so I will quote it with some length:

⁷And He said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." ⁸But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove,

and a young pigeon.”¹⁰And he brought Him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.¹¹And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.¹³Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.¹⁴But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.¹⁵As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.¹⁶And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.¹⁸On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates. - Genesis 15:7-18

Now, what is going on here with cutting animals in two pieces and a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch flying through the middle of the pieces? Seems strange? God was not simply trying to upset PETA.¹⁵ A little background in the ancient near eastern practice

of covenant making will shed some light and some amazement as to what God is doing here. The old school way of making a covenant was for two parties, usually kings, to come to terms and agreement. Then as a way of promising faithfulness, the kings would take animals, cut them in two and then walk through the pieces declaring— “If I prove unfaithful to this covenant promise, let be done to me what has been done to these.” It was a serious way to commit oneself to utter faithfulness to a covenant promise. Now, look back into the Abraham narrative in Genesis 15 and marvel for a bit at who makes the promise and who “passes through the pieces.” Yes, it is God who promises utter faithfulness to covenant relationship, in fact, it is after the fire pot and torch (light and fire are images for God) pass through the pieces that Scripture says “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram.” God had made a promise to Abraham and his offspring and He puts Himself on the line that it will come to pass. This is the nature of God; He is a covenant making and covenant keeping God. So a covenant has a faithful and strong promised commitment (remember this, we are talking about sex) and a sign that serves as a seal and a reminder of that promise and relationship. Let’s now look at the sign God gave to Abraham.

Covenant Sign

I often joke that one of the proofs that biblical faith is indeed divinely inspired is the Old Testament sign of covenant. In my mind it does not seem like something that men

would make up. Picture for a second two ancient near eastern men discussing God and religion; imagine with me a dialog between these guys.

Lot: *Perhaps our people should be called God's special people.*

Abram: *Yes, we could think of ourselves as the chosen people.*

Lot: *Indeed, good idea – but how can we show that we are different?*

Abram: *Yes, we really need a special way to mark our club, what do you suggest?*

Lot: *Perhaps we should cut our fingers, or brand our arms with a hot piece of bronze...or we could pinky swear our faithfulness to God or have a special handshake!*

Abram: *Naw, dog, I have a much better idea, let's cut off part of our...*

Okay, this is just NOT something that a man is likely to make up and to me confirms the inspiration of Old Testament faith. Apologies for that little tangent but it does introduce the sign of the God's covenant with Abraham. For the sign of the covenant we must look at the account in Genesis 17.

⁹And God said to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹²He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, ¹³both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. - Genesis 17:9-13

So in summary, a promise and a sign makes up a covenantal relationship and this sort of relationship is designed by God to illustrate to us “Who He is.” He is a faithful lover committed to His promises with the very bodies of His people marked and set apart as belonging to Him. Okay, now let’s get a second vocabulary word to discuss God and sex which is called a “covenant” in Scripture. For this is precisely what marriage is called in Scripture.

Marriage

If you break down what marriage actually is it is a promise and a sign; it is a covenant between a man and a woman before God. The promise we see quite readily in the exchange of vows. Usually they include something like—You, me, forever, I mean it, before God, no matter what happens—you promise these things and you get married. Well, usually there are some tears and more poetic words involved, but this is the gist of the marriage vow. Now let me ask you a question, what is the “sign” that outwardly seals the marriage vow? What is the visible sign of the marriage covenant? Most people in our culture would probably be thinking of a wedding band at this point, which is a symbol of the marriage. Yet the real answer is somewhat more beautiful than gold or platinum. The sign that seals or *consummates* the marriage is sex.¹⁶ Faithfulness is promised and the two become one flesh as the marriage is sealed by the sharing of our bodies. The wonderful thing about this is that marriage is designed to illustrate the loving, passionate covenant keeping God. Stay with me here. God made covenants with humanity to show His love, grace and passion for His people. He made marriage as the illustration of such covenant love. Sex exists to show us what God is like. Don’t believe me—let’s look at what the New Testament has to say. After describing marital duties of husbands to wives and wives to husbands, the apostle Paul penned this stunning line of Scripture.

³¹Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. ³²This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

- Ephesians 5:31-32

A man will leave his parents and be united to his wife and they will have sex. This mystery (one flesh marital intimacy) is referring to the relationship of Jesus and His church. In fact the Scriptures teach that Jesus is the Bridegroom who comes to marry His bride the church (Matthew 9; 25; Mark 2; Luke 5; John 3; Revelation 18). The beautiful celebration which will take place in the Kingdom of Heaven is the marriage feast where Jesus and His bride celebrate together their union. Reid, are you saying that Jesus wants to have sex with us? Not precisely, but pretty close. He desires that sex be an intense, passionate, picture to us of His covenantal relationship to us. Look back with me at the purposes we discussed above regarding God's purpose for sexuality.

1. **Procreation** – The metaphor chosen in Scripture for God growing His church is that of a family. He is our Father, we are born again to be His children and the gospel bears fruit reproducing new believers. Birth comes through intimate union; the new birth comes from the work of God in our lives to bring us into union with Christ.

2. **Unification** – The intense covenant love between God and His people is illustrated by the intimacy between husband and wife. Marriage joins two together; God is bringing His people back from separation into relationship with Himself.
3. **Recreation/Pleasure** – All physical pleasure is a gift of God which points to greater spiritual pleasures with Him in relationship. We are not to worship sex and make an idol out of an orgasm, yet we must see that sexual pleasures should point to greater spiritual ecstasy with God.

*You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there
is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
- Psalm 16:11*

4. **Glorification** – Sex is ultimately about God. It is designed to show the beauty of covenant keeping, deep intimate love. A few more vocabulary words are in order.

Faithfulness

Biblically speaking, faithfulness is keeping one's covenant promises. To be unfaithful is to turn away and walk out on the one you are in covenant with. When one is unfaithful to us it causes intense disappointment and the deeper the relationship the deeper the pain.

God is portrayed as constant and faithful in both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture. His people however are not always faithful. It is very interesting to observe the language God uses for an unfaithful people in the Bible. The words He chooses are **adulterous** and being a **whore**; both terms directly related to sex. We do not



know what these terms even mean except that God has made us sexual beings who can be unfaithful and betray. The Book of Hosea is a fascinating study as it shows God's people as unfaithful harlots and God as a loving husband. The beauty of the book is that God loves the unfaithful, brings her back and marries the whore. God is in the business of redemption, bringing back people to be the receptors of His covenant love. This demonstrates that God

has given us sex to show us how to live in covenant faithfulness and the pain and consequences of unfaithfulness. Two final words we must understand before looking at God's commands regarding sexuality.

Sexual Immorality

Sex outside of God's design is called fornication. The Greek term is *porneia* in the New Testament. The word was translated in old school Bibles as fornication—more modern translations as sexual immorality. *Porneia* and its derivatives (*porne*, *pornos*) encompass all manner of behaviors and actions and is the term from which we derive the English word pornography. ***Pornea*** is a bit of a junk drawer word that describes sexual acts which pervert the design God has for sexuality. The clear message of Scripture is that if you are not in covenant with this man or woman, if they are not your husband, not your wife—then having sex with them is *pornea*. It is an immoral act and a distortion of what God has made. The second word is adultery, which means to break faithfulness with the one you are covenanted with. So in light of our vocabulary—covenant, marriage, faithfulness, F and A words we may summarize theologically the reason that sex exists.

The reason sex was created by God is so we would understand the covenant love and faithfulness of God in the gospel. Sex was given to humanity so that we would walk towards God, towards spiritual pleasure and then experience sex—procreative, unifying, pleasurable, God glorifying sex without shame. The marriage relationship displays to us and others the beautiful, holy, life-giving and self-giving love of God. **That is what sex is for.** If we use sex in another way, God is dishonored and people get hurt. Now, keep this in mind as we look at

one of the clearest commands God gives us for the handling of our sexuality.

Command in Context

God never gives commands without giving us understanding. The theological and biblical view of sex must be in our hearts and minds as we look to His Commandments. God has the prerogative to give us commands because He knows how He made life and knows what is best for us. Here is His counsel to us regarding our bodies.

*⁴Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you **ought to live** and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you **abstain from sexual immorality**; ⁴that each one of you know **how to control his own body in holiness and honor**, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles **who do not know God**; ⁶that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you. - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8*

A few thoughts are in order. Chastity in singleness and fidelity in marriage is the way human beings ought to live to please God. In this passage, a group of Christians is being encouraged to continue to honor God more and more. The will of God is that we abstain, or avoid all sexual immorality, for God wants to sanctify us, or set us apart for His purposes. The phrase “*that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor*” could be literally translated “that we learn to possess our own vessel.” As followers of Christ our desire is to not use our bodies in ways that dishonor God, but rather exercise self-control over them—to bring Him glory. Those around us who do not know God may live in the passion of lust; it should not be so with us. This is a serious issue to God. So much that this passage teaches us that God is the avenger of those who wrong one another sexually. Remember, marriage and sex were made to display God’s character and love for His church; it is a deep thing which should not be trivialized by our perversion.

So I want to issue a strong warning to us. If you are a young man using women’s bodies for your own pleasure without any sort of marriage commitment and covenant with her, you are sinning against both her and God. The same can be said to the ladies. There are those today like radio shock jock Tom Leykis who is counseling young people to take advantage of others. He has even stooped so low as to encourage young men to take advantage of women with a history of sexual abuse as they tend to be more promiscuous.¹⁷

The Scriptures are clear that God is the avenger of all such things. Paul's warning is that we knock it off; people get hurt and God is dishonored.

In giving us sexuality, God has called us to holiness and His glory. It is a great gift for our good and a reflection of His goodness. Yet living in this world we are surrounded with sexual images all the time and temptation is very real. At this point, I will only say that in fighting temptation we must travel a path of saying yes to other pleasures. Just say no is a great slogan, but it is really not helpful in our battle with sexual sin. You see God has not made us to only say no. He has created us to say a resounding YES to Him. The way to fight temptation is to love God, to love what is good, to live in intimate, accountable friendships in community, to repent of our failures and trust the gospel in light of our sin. True victory in these areas may seem far from you, but the only way you will walk towards holiness is by saying YES to God Himself. The 19th century Scottish preacher Thomas Chalmers once said it this way:

*The best way to casting out an impure affection is to admit a pure one; and by the love of what is good to expel the love of what is evil.*¹⁸

For those who are struggling with sexual addictions (porn, prostitutes, serial partners, hooking up, friends with benefits, same sex lust, etc.) we want to encourage you that God's grace is real and the light is better than darkness. You will need to lock

arms with others in recovery so you do not stay alone in your helplessness. The power of sexuality is immense and the addiction to illicit sex is strong. Yet captives are set free in the work of our God—He is slow to anger, abounding in love and keeps covenant with us even when we are faithless. Tell the truth, be honest in your longings and walk toward God today in repentance. We love you and encourage your journey toward sexual integrity and the liberation of your life by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Final Word – On Being Radical

Growing up a non-Christian, I used to think it was so radical to do certain things which usually involved alcohol, fighting and women. When I was in college I thought it an original idea to get a fake ID, get drunk, fight, chase women, try to “hook up” and watch porn. After Jesus grabbed a hold of my life and began to change my perspective I thought to myself: *Is this radical? Is this rebellious? Is this all that?* I have a ground breaking idea for Thursday nights—I’m going to get wasted. How original!?

When I began to look at God’s perspective on sexuality I realized that I needed to repent and trust God to help me change. I remember shocking my Dad that I was not having sex with my girlfriend (that young woman, Kasey, is now my wife). I remember throwing away a friend’s porno movie that I had in my dorm room—he was not happy, but I think Jesus was. I remember all the questions I got from guys on my wrestling team.

One even told me that the new Reid sucked and he liked the old Reid better. I remember saying to myself—*this is a radical life*. I want to be a man who desires God, who struggles to love what is good, honor God with my body rather than prostitute myself and others with a perverted view of sex. It has not been a road free of temptation and failures of the heart; I'll be the first to admit my own struggles toward holiness. Yet, God has called us to something pure and good and He gives grace and strength to obey His call. It is possible to change in His hands and have Him redeem your sexuality. I have been married almost 12 years; I have three beautiful kids which have come from the blessings of the marriage bed. I have been faithful to one woman and I love her dearly to this day. I ask you to dream a new dream about sex and to come away from the visions of depravity offered by the world. There is a more excellent way.

Yours for walking towards Him together,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reid S. Monaghan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Reid S. Monaghan

Endnotes

- ¹ Carol Platt Liebau, *Prude: How the Sex-Obsessed Culture Damages Girls (and America, Too!)* (Center Street, 2007).
- ² “Internet Filter Review”, <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html> (accessed December 11 2007).
- ³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Std Fact Sheets,” CDC http://www.cdc.gov/std/healthcomm/fact_sheets.htm (accessed December 11 2007).
- ⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Basic Statistics on HIV/Aids,” CDC <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/basic.htm> (accessed December 11 2007).
- ⁵ Prevention, “Std Fact Sheets “ (accessed).
- ⁶ “National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases National Institutes of Health - Std Factsheets,” <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/publications/stds.htm> (accessed March 16 2006).
- ⁷ Evan Bayh, “National Facts on Fatherhood,” http://bayh.senate.gov/issues_fatherhood_stats.html (accessed December 11 2007).
- ⁸ National Fatherhood Initiative, “The Father Factor” https://www.fatherhood.org/father_factor.asp (accessed December 11 2007).
- ⁹ Christopher Reinhart Sandra Norman-Eady, Peter Martino, “Statutory Rape Laws by State,” State of Connecticut <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2003/olrdata/jud/rpt/2003-R-0376.htm> (accessed December 11 2007).

- ¹⁰ Peter Singer, "Heavy Petting," Nerve <http://www.nerve.com/Opinions/Singer/heavyPetting/main.asp> (accessed March 22 2006).
- ¹¹ See Augustine, *The City of God*, A Doubleday Image Book ; D59 (Garden City, NY,: Image Books, 1958). Book XIV, Chapters 15-24.
- ¹² A simple look at the list of fertility goddesses on Wikipedia will suffice to demonstrate: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Fertility_goddesses
- ¹³ Justin Taylor and John Piper, *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 15, 16.
- ¹⁴ For more on covenants in general please see Reid Monaghan, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Inversion Booklet Series (2008).
- ¹⁵ PETA is short for the animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Let me just say they can be a bit nuts at times.
- ¹⁶ For sex as the sign of the marriage covenant, see Mark Dever, Michael Lawrence, Matt Schmucker and Scott Croft, *Sex and the Single Man* in Taylor and Piper. 137-138.
- ¹⁷ Rebecca Vesely, "Radio Shock Jock Pushes Limits of Sexist Gab", Women's eNews <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1172> (accessed March 23 2006).
- ¹⁸ Thomas Chalmers, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection " http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_details/23690/The-Expulsive-Power-of-a-New-Affection/c-225/ (accessed January 21 2008).

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<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1172> (accessed March 23
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Suggested Resources

Books

- Feldhahn, Shaunti *For Women Only* and *For Men Only* Multnomah Books
- Taylor, Justin, and John Piper. *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005.
- Kostenbeger, Andreas and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage and Family – Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*. Wheaton: Crossway Books 2004.
- Ensor, John *Doing Things Right in the Matters of the Heart*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007
- Mahaney, C.J. and Carolyn Mahaney *Sex, Romance and the Glory of God*. Wheaton: Crossway Books 2004.

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