

Lesson 10 Sexual Ethics

I. Introduction:

Consider the following excerpt:

“We hardly need to be reminded in Western culture that we live in a sex-charged society. Everything from automobiles and underwear to vacations and wine is sold on its sex appeal. Sometimes the solicitation is explicit, but more often than not the appeal is implicit, hidden and quite subtle. People too often do not realize that they desire and buy objects because of their sexual attraction. The media contributes greatly to this situation. Michael A. Carrera, who teaches at Hunter College in New York and is director of Adolescent Sexuality Programs for The Children’s Aid Society, says there are about twenty thousand scenes on television each year that suggest sexual acts, all of them without regard to the outcome. Such programming suggests that this is what “real” men are all about.”¹

- A. What messages does our culture communicate about sex?

- B. What are some subtle ways in which church culture at large has been influenced by world’s messages regarding sex?

Without a doubt the world around us is saturated with sex. Sex education is taught in the public schools, sex is perverted and packaged over the internet, and sex sells everything from tortilla chips to automobiles to weight loss programs. With so many conflicting messages about sex it is incumbent upon us to discern what the Bible has to say about this blessing from God. Consequently, the purpose of this study will be to understand Biblical sexuality so that we can enjoy this gift from God in an unadulterated way. Lord willing we can apply these truths to ourselves, and be better informed about how to teach and instruct our children to embrace as Biblical sexual ethic.

II. Background:

Over the last half of this century at least six factors have influenced a striking shift in our culture’s attitude toward sexuality. **The first is secularism.** This is the view that God must be removed from all areas of human thought and activity. One of the outworkings of this belief has been a move to value-free sex education in our schools. Biblical and theological reasons for moral behavior have been removed from this teaching, and that

¹ Sey Chassler, “What Teen Boys Think About Sex,” *Par Mag* (December 18, 1988): 8.

has had an important impact on sexual attitudes. Without divine absolutes governing sexuality, one is left to personal preferences.

A second factor is *privatization*. It is commonly held that many areas of life, especially one's sexual preferences, are one's own business. Neither the state nor the church should interfere.

Third, there is the matter of *scientific frankness*. Freud taught that the sex impulse is fundamental to our nature as human beings, that sexuality is open to enormous repression, and that by examining our unconscious we can neutralize our obsessions. To many this meant that any attempt to limit sexual expression is psychologically harmful, and even capable of making one insane. Thus, it was thought to be healthy to throw off restraint. Moreover, this scientific approach made sex appear to be a "thing" that could be studied, analyzed and modified. It seemed less mysterious.

Media exposure is a fourth factor. With the rise of modern technology the forms of public communication have multiplied. They reach us in our homes, cars, and in the workplace. And seldom do we encounter these media without some appeal to sex. So common is this experience that we are barely aware of it. This constant bombardment of depersonalized, seductive sex seems normal.

Part of the media exposure of sex includes the explosion of pornography, which glorifies all forms of sexual expression. It is not just the increasingly more explicit pictures that are so influential in contemporary attitudes and activities. It is the philosophy that accompanies these pictures that has been tremendously detrimental. Whereas earlier in this century certain forms of sexual permissiveness were unthinkable, the Playboy philosophy relentlessly expounded by Hugh Hefner and others has anesthetized modern society to the idea that any of this might be wrong.

A fifth factor can be called *existential schizophrenia*. Reality and personal meaning have been divorced. The real is what is scientifically quantifiable and verifiable. Emotions such as love and purpose are not quantifiable. Therefore, they are not real, but they have personal meaning. What results is a distinction between values and behavior. Values such as "love" and "community" are praised, while their application is left up to the individual. In the case of sexual ethics, the divorce between value and behavior often leads to sex simply for personal gratification without any thought for the other person.

Therapeutic values are a final factor. Values that govern the counselor in his or her work are becoming the values of society as a whole. The counselor must be accepting, sympathetic and understanding if the client is to be helped. Hence, there is reluctance to condemn any expression of one's feelings and needs as wrong. While these methods of dealing with people have great pastoral worth, they should not be isolated from moral obligation. If they are, one becomes accepting of any behavior whether it is right or wrong.¹

- What has been the fruit of these sexually revolutionary thoughts upon society?

¹Feinberg, John S. ; Feinberg, Paul D. ; Huxley, Aldous: *Ethics for a Brave New World*. Wheaton, Ill. : Crossway Books, 1996, c1993, S. 151

III. Statistics:

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fewer than half of all US high school students have had sexual intercourse. In 2007, 47.8% of US high school students reported that they had ever had sexual intercourse. This number has shown a downward trend since 1991, when the figure was 54.1%.²

A survey commissioned by NBC and People Magazine found that, while only 27% of 13- to 16-year-olds had been involved in intimate or sexual activity, 8% had had a casual sexual relationship which has been described by one journalist as a "profound shift in the culture of high school dating and sex." In his book, *Why Gender Matters*, researcher Leonard Sax states that teenage sexual encounters are increasingly taking place outside the context of romantic relationships, in purely sexual "hookups."³

Increasing rates of oral sex among teens have been reported. However a study released in 2008 by the Guttmacher Institute found that, while oral sex is slightly more common than vaginal sex among teens, the prevalence of oral sex among teen opposite-sex partners has held steady for the last decade. According to the study, slightly more than half (55%) of 15- to 19-year-olds have engaged in heterosexual oral sex, 50% have engaged in vaginal sex and 11% have had anal sex.⁴

IV. What is Sex?

- A. Many teenagers will insist that they are virgins even though they may have engaged various activities such as oral sex. They rationalize that as long as they have never actually had intercourse, they have never technically had sex. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

- B. Why is it dangerous to restrict the definition of sex to such a narrow category as intercourse?

Note: On the most basic level, sex consists of intercourse between a man and a woman. Yet the Bible's injunctions against homosexuality and bestiality seem to broaden this definition. For the purposes of this study, we will define sex as any act of stimulation with the intent or effect of producing physical climax.

V. Sexual Morality:

A. Designed for Marriage Exclusively:

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolescent_sexuality

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

1. *Deut. 22:13-15, 17, 20-21:*

¹³ *“If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then turns against her, ¹⁴ and charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her, and says, ‘I took this woman, but when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin,’ ¹⁵ then the girl’s father and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of the girl’s virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. . . . ¹⁷ and behold, he has charged her with shameful deeds, saying, ‘I did not find your daughter a virgin.’ But this is the evidence of my daughter’s virginity.’ And they shall spread the garment before the elders of the city. ²⁰ “But if this charge is true, that the girl was not found a virgin, ²¹ then they shall bring out the girl to the doorway of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death because she has committed an act of folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father’s house; thus you shall purge the evil from among you.*

- a. What is the succession of events in verse *13-14*?
- b. When was it okay for the man to have sexual relations with the woman (vs. *13*)?
- c. What was the punishment for the bride who was shown not to be a virgin (*20-21*)?

2. *Hebrews 13:4:*

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

- a. What is God’s assessment of the marriage bed?
- b. Who will be judged?
- c. What is the difference between adulterers and fornicators (cf. *I Cor. 6:9*)?

I Corinthians 6:9 Or 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 effeminate, nor homosexuals,

- d. Does there seem to be any allowance for sex outside the marriage bed in this verse? Why or why not?

Note: The very word fornication means consensual sexual relations between two persons not married to each other. Therefore, whenever we see an injunction against fornication (i.e. *1 Cor. 6:9*) God expresses His displeasure for pre-marital sex.

B. What Constitutes a Marriage?

1. One warm summer night Gunther and Gretchen find themselves in the heat of passion. As Gunther begins to move in for the kill, Gretchen pulls back and tells him, “No, not until we’re married!” Gunther pledges his undying love and commitment to Gretchen, and she reciprocates; thus, they both conclude that they are, for all intents and purposes, married. Are they? Why or why not?
2. How would you advise a friend who is considering sleeping with his fiancée, reasoning that they have already made a commitment to one another and the marriage ceremony is a mere formality?
3. What ends or dissolves a marriage (*Matt. 5:32; Romans 7:2*)?

Matthew 5:32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Romans 7:2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband.

4. How can the knowledge of what ends a marriage contribute to our understanding of how a marriage begins?
5. Does God recognize the marriage of unbelievers? Why or why not?

1 Corinthians 7:12-13 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.¹³ And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.

6. What about polygamy? Examine **Gen. 2:18-25**:

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."¹⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.²⁰ The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place.²² The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- a. From the above passage how would we define marriage?
- b. Should this serve as an example for all marriages?
 - i. When did this marriage take place?
 - ii. Who designed this marriage?
- c. What does **Eph. 5:31** suggest about its relevance today?

Ephesians 5:31 FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

- d. Does this passage allow for polygamy? Why or why not?

Note: There are numerous reasons for the rise of polygamy, which apart from sensuous considerations included the need to maintain endogamous marriages⁵, the desires to increase the Israelite population (necessary because wars decimated the male population), the necessity of providing for destitute widows in order to avoid slavery, prostitution and the like, and the maintenance of the nation's working force. These factors notwithstanding, the ideal Hebrew marriage continued to be monogamous, despite the examples set to the contrary by royalty.⁶

Definition of Marriage: Marriage is the state of being united with one member of the opposite sex. This is a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law and can only be dissolved through divorce or death. This is a union consecrated by God, regardless of the religious or nonreligious beliefs of the participants.

C. The Purpose of Sex Within Marriage:

As with all created things, God has an expressed purpose for sex within marriage.

1. *Gen. 1:27-28:*

²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

- According to this passage what is the purpose of sex?

2. *Gen. 2:18-25:*

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."¹⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.²⁰ The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs

⁵ An endogamous marriage – also known as a levirate marriage – was designed to preserve the brother's family line so that the widow could bear a son and keep the brother's name and the inherited land in the family. Judah and Tamar as well as Ruth a Boaz are the most famous examples of this type of marriage.

⁶ R.K. Harrison "Polygamy" in ISBE V. III (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1986) p. 901

and closed up the flesh at that place.²² The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."²⁴ For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- a. What does one flesh suggest about God's design for marriage? What does that look like?

- b. How does the sexual union help to accomplish this?

3. *Proverbs 5:15-19*

Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well.¹⁶ Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets?¹⁷ Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you.¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth.¹⁹ As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love.

- According to the above passage why has God given us sex?

4. *1 Corinthians 7:2-5:*

But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.³ The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.⁵ Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

- a. Why does Paul command the Corinthians to stop depriving each other?

- b. In view of the above answer what does this passage teach us about the purpose of sex?

Summary: Sex has several purposes within marriage. It fulfills mankind's mandate to procreate. Sex sanctifies the marriage relationship setting it apart from all others. Intimacy helps to create and nurture a special bond between husband and wife which is to be shared between the two of them alone. Sex also safeguards men and women from temptation. Finally, intimacy and pleasure enhance the relationship between the husband and wife as they enjoy God's wedding gift to them.

D. Principles Governing Sex Within Marriage:

1. After years of ingesting pornography, Wolfgang repented of his sins and gave his life to Christ. Shortly after his conversion, he met someone special and they were engaged to be married. Even though he has been a changed man in many areas, when you talk to him you find out that his background in pornography has greatly influenced his sexual expectations. You also find out that his fiancée loves Harlequin Romance novels and has been devouring them for years.
 - a. Who or what has shaped this couple's view of sex?
 - b. Why do you suppose it's necessary to have a biblical view of sex, especially in this case?

2. How do the following verses contribute to a biblical understanding of sex within marriage?
 - a. *Acts 20:35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*
 - b. *Phil. 2:3-4: Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*
 - c. *1 Cor. 7:3-5: The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife does not have*

*authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*⁵ *Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

- d. *1 Cor. 8:12: And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.*

VI. What About Masturbation?

A. Introduction:

Social scientists estimate that perhaps as many as 90 percent of males have masturbated. However, this is not simply a male practice. While the figures are a bit lower for females, a majority of them have masturbated. This sexual practice, along with the self-loathing that often accompanies it, frequently dominates adolescence. But, again, this is not simply a problem of adolescence. Surveys show that it is practiced by many within a happy marriage that is sexually satisfying. Even more adults, male and female, practice autostimulation after divorce or death of a mate and the return to singleness. Thus, one simply cannot avoid addressing the practice.⁷

B. Christian Views:

1. There is no clear prohibition against masturbation. Therefore, it can in certain limited circumstances be helpful.
2. Masturbation is always wrong, period.
3. While the Bible does not clearly condemn masturbation, other factors strongly suggest that Christians should abstain from it. In the next section I will support this view.

C. When Masturbation is clearly wrong:

1. *Matthew 5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; 28 but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. 29 "And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

⁷Feinberg, John S. ; Feinberg, Paul D. ; Huxley, Aldous: *Ethics for a Brave New World*. Wheaton, Ill. : Crossway Books, 1996, c1993, S. 162

In the words of John Piper:

Is masturbation wrong? Let me address the issue mainly for men. I cannot imagine sexual orgasm in the loins without sexual image in the mind. I know there are nocturnal emissions, which I regard as innocent and helpful, but I doubt that they are ever orgasmic apart from a sexual dream that supplies the necessary image in the mind. Evidently God has constituted the connection between sexual orgasm and sexual thought in such a way that the force and pleasure of orgasm is dependent on the thought or images in our minds.⁸

2. *1 Corinthians 7:3 Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

Note: Masturbation is wrong when it prevents a man from fulfilling his duty to his wife.

3. *1 Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.*

Note: Masturbation is wrong if it becomes an enslaving habit.

D. Other considerations:

1. Would you be comfortable telling your pastor or ministry leader that you engage in it regularly?
2. How would you feel if the Lord came back right as you engaged in the act?
3. Would you be comfortable telling younger believers that such an action is okay?

⁸ www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/1984/1941_Missions_and_Masturbation/

4. Would you respect a pastor or spiritual leader who engaged in this activity regularly and without remorse?
5. Does this action lead to other sins, like lust, selfishness, etc.?
6. Do such actions dampen your appetite for the Word and Prayer?

VII. Thought Questions:

- A. After your pastor teaches a lesson on the importance of sexual abstinence a friend of yours candidly confides that waiting for marriage seems like a real drag. How would you respond to this?
- B. If one of your children, grandchildren, or little sister/brother came up to you and asked, "How can I stay pure until marriage?" what would you tell them?
- C. What should you do if you discover pornography on your thirteen year old son's computer?

VIII. Conclusion:

In the words of Christ, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (*Matt. 5:8*). The quest for sexual purity must be rooted in a desire for intimacy with God. The Lord does not sit up in heaven trying to stop His creation from having fun; rather, He intends for His creation to fully enjoy the world He made on His terms. Sex is a gift from God, a beautiful expression of love between a husband and a wife when celebrated within the parameters of Biblical revelation. Yet, when indulged in a manner outside of God's prescribed ways, Satan uses sex to enslave, ensnare, and exploit both believers and unbelievers alike. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that we strive to be holy in this area to maintain our witness to the world and our intimacy with God.