THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SEX

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## Introduction

The Bible is extremely explicit on sex. From the Genesis 2 passage to explain that a man and woman will become one flesh, through to the sexually immoral dogs of Revelation 22, sex is a constant topic of conversation in this book. The current culture has redefined and perverted sex beyond the point of recognition. This perversion has caused some to misunderstand the church’s view, saying that the Bible condemns sex or that we aren’t meant to enjoy it. But, a proper handling of the word of God reveals the true view of sex, and this view is the subject of the following paper. To begin, we will discuss the pertinent passages to the issue, and then, from these passages, we will define the biblical model of good, moral, sex. After this, we will look at the boundaries that should not be crossed, boundaries that protect us from the perversions of sex, which carry physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences. Then, some of the most common perversions of sex will be addressed from the biblical standpoint.

## The Pertinent Passages

Were we to examine every passage that commented on or dealt with sex, we would write a fifty-page paper, so only those key passages that help to differentiate between good and bad sex will be presented here. There are many more passages than the ones here, but they are either repetitive or go into unnecessary detail for our purposes. To begin with: The Old Testament.

# Old Testament Passages

Gen 1:28 is considered a questionable starting point today as some debate about whether or not God was referring to sex in this passage. The phrase, “Be fruitful and multiply” is the phrase in question. It is the first command that God gives to Adam and Eve after creating them. The most natural reading of this command seems to suggest that he is telling the first two humans to procreate, i.e. have sex and bear children.

Since there are some who debate whether this is truly a command to procreate or simply a command to tend the garden, Genesis 2:24-25 is a more solid starting point when discussing sex.

In this second passage, Moses explains the purpose of the relation between men and women. Because God created the woman from man and then brought the woman to the man, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, becoming one flesh. Just in case we weren’t sure if the reference to being “joined together” was spiritual or physical, the writer goes on to point out that they were naked and unashamed. Yes, Adam and Eve are definitely engaging in a proper sexual relationship at this point. This picture of the first proper sexual relationship will be key in the next section.

Leviticus 18 and 20 will be useful later, when discussing the boundaries of sex, but are not particularly helpful when learning what is good to do, only what is not good.

Finally, there are many helpful passages within the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The Song of Solomon describes a healthy and pleasurable sexual experience between two young lovers on their wedding night, and there are a few Proverbs that mention healthy sexuality. In particular, Proverbs 5:18-20 is a helpful passage. It tells the reader to rejoice in his wife and to let her breasts satisfy him at all times. It tells the reader to be exhilarated with the love of his wife. These emotions and reactions to sexuality are good things for a man to experience and for a woman to experience in regard to her husband.

# New Testament Passages

The New Testament follows one particular theme, over and over again, on the subject of sex: abstain from sexual immorality. The problem is that sexual immorality is never clearly defined. It is assumed to be known to the reader. Later in this paper, sexual immorality will be defined, but for the present we will look at the pertinent passages to understanding a healthy sexuality in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 6 and 7 are the most explicit passages in instructing a Christian how to express themselves sexually. Verses such as 6:18, “Flee sexual immorality,” and 7:2, “because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife and likewise also the wife to her husband.” These instructions help us to understand that sex is a powerful thing that should be expressed within the bounds of marriage. Unfortunately, we still don’t have a definition of sexual immorality, only a command to flee it.

Other helpful passages from the New Testament concerning sex are Hebrews 13:4, which tells us to keep the marriage bed undefiled because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. 1 Thessalonians 4:3, which tells us that the will of God for our lives is our sanctification, which includes abstaining from sexual immorality. Colossians 3:5 tells us to put to death the earthly desire to sexual immorality and impurity. Other passages that say much of the same are 1 Timothy 1:10, Galatians 5:19-21, Mark 7:20-23, Ephesians 5:3, Romans 1:27, 2 Timothy 2:22, 1 Peter 2:11, and Jude 1:7. All of these follow the similar pattern of telling the reader to turn away from passionate, uncontrolled, lusts and sexually immoral acts, and to turn toward self-control and purity.

## The Model of Good, MORAL Sex

What then is the model for good, biblical, moral sex? Based on the passages above, and trying to synthesize them in a concise and useful way, I have come to the conclusion that the best kind of moral sex must follow three key points. (1) It should take place between one man and one woman. (2) It must fulfill the main purpose of sex, unparalleled intimacy and oneness between partners, and may fulfill one of two minor purposes: pleasure or procreation. (3) It must take place within the bounds of marriage.

# One Man and One Woman

First, why must it be between one man and one woman? This point arises from a myriad of warnings against homosexuality and orgies that are repeated in multiple passages in the Old and New Testament. (Lev 18:22; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Rom 1:26-28; Lev 20:13; 1 Tim 1:10; Jude 1:7; Judges 19; Gal 5:19-21; Rom 13:13-14) While there are many instances of polygamy in the bible, it is never specifically commended, whereas sleeping with multiple simultaneous sexual partners is specifically condemned. This makes the first key point vital to good, moral sex.

Not only are these passages established to warn against the negative, but the picture of sex prior to the corruption of the fall was between one man and one woman (Gen 1:28) and we are told repeatedly of the benefit of a man having his one wife to whom he is faithful. (1 Cor 7:2-5; Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:2) These factors support the conclusion that good sex is to take place between one man and one woman.

# Oneness

Second, why must it fulfill the main purpose of sex: intimacy? This point is necessary because it is the description that God gave the first man and woman when he created sex. The purest picture of sex that we have is the one between Adam and Eve in the garden prior to the fall of man. In this picture, we see God give the woman to her man and tell them to become one flesh. Gen 2:24 says that, “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed.” They were not just naked next to each other; they were naked *with* each other. This is clearly a euphemism. They were having sex and it was great sex. But the purpose of that sex was to bring them together, to make them one flesh. Adam eloquently describes Eve as becoming bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. Sex, therefore, is here to bring two humans closer together than any other act on earth can. No other action can two humans perform to bring them closer together than to be naked together and not ashamed.

The minor purposes of sex, pleasure and procreation, are biblical purposes as well, and will likely occur when good, moral sex is being had. Procreation, an obvious biological purpose of sex, is also commanded of us in Genesis 1:28, when God instructs Adam and eve to be fruitful and multiply. Pleasure, in Song of Solomon, is seen as a beautiful minor purpose of sex that fuels intimacy and oneness between two spouses. These two minor purposes, however, are not completely necessary to have good, moral sex, but are helpful purposes to fulfill nonetheless.

# In Marriage

Finally, why must sex take place within the bounds of marriage? This key point comes mostly from the New Testament passages in 1 Corinthians 7 that instruct Christians to keep the marriage bed undefiled, and that each husband is to have one wife and each wife one husband. Not only that, Paul goes on to say that single people burning with passion for each other should get married, indicating that he saw sexual intercourse to be an action properly experienced after marriage and not before it.

Also, countless times in the Old and New Testament, we see instructions and warnings not to commit adultery. The simplest definition of adultery is: sexual intimacy with a person to whom you are not married. If this definition is correct, it logically follows that sex must be experienced within the bounds of marriage, so as not to commit adultery. It is for these logical and biblical reasons that the third key point must stand. Sexual intercourse is an action for married couples to share, period and full stop.

## Specific Perversions

Given the key points above, it should be understood that any sexual activity that does not get a check next to those three key points is not acceptable for the Christian. That being said, some specific issues that lie outside of this biblical model need to be specifically addressed.

# Adultery

Adultery is the most widely condemned sexual act in the Bible. It is mentioned in almost every genre in the Bible and has its clearest prohibition in Exodus 20:14, “You shall not commit adultery.” Jesus ups the ante in Matthew 5:28 when he says that, “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” There is no question about the bible’s view on adultery: it’s wrong. By every scale and measurement, adultery is a deplorable sin and is not acceptable. There is no grey area in which to make an argument.

# Premarital Sex

Premarital sex, while not stated in those words, is also clearly outside the Bible’s model of good, moral sex. The simplest way to make this case is to point out that the definition of adultery applies to premarital sex. Some, however, might say that adultery is only something that one can commit when they are already married. While I disagree with this statement, premarital sex, even with this definition of adultery, is still a non-biblical act.

Premarital sex cannot be considered an acceptable activity because of 1 Corinthians 7’s command to marry so as not to burn with passion for one another. Paul clearly makes the assumption that burning with passion, and giving into the temptation to have sex prior to marriage, would be immoral and wrong and so tells the reader to marry in order that the sex might be moral. This sentiment is repeated all over the New Testament with commands to “flee sexual immorality”. Premarital sex may rightly be called sexual immorality because it allows people to experience the minor purposes of sex (pleasure and procreation) without committing to the main purpose of sex—oneness. The marriage of two people is the commitment of the will to be completely united with each other in every way. Sex is the reflection of that commitment. If two people are wiling to have the sex without the commitment, oneness is not achieved and so the oldest and most important purpose of sexual relations is ignored.

# Homosexuality

There are multiple passages in the Old and New Testament that specifically condemn homosexual activity as sinful. While many arguments have been made in the current culture that these commands should be disregarded, the arguments are weak at best. Unfortunately, our current culture has become desensitized to this sin since the sexual revolution, but there can be no question about it. Homosexuality is equally sinful with all other sexual immorality. It may be erroneous to ascribe more weight to this sin than to the sin of adultery, or bestiality, or incest but it is not erroneous to affix the name of sin to homosexual activity. The passages that specifically comment on homosexuality (in the order in which they appear in the Bible) are, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26-28, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:10, and Jude 1:7.

# Masturbation

Masturbation, while not specifically commented on in the Bible, should also be considered to be at least unbeneficial activity and at worst sinful. Considering the remarkable specificity of sexual sin in the Bible, the lack of specific condemnation of masturbation is worth noting. Two passages in the New Testament may suggest the act of masturbation.

First, Matthew 5:28-30. Jesus, while speaking in the context of sexual sin, tells his audience that if their right hand causes them to sin to cut it off for it is better for them to lose one member of their body than for their whole body to be thrown into hell. Some say that he is speaking of masturbation because of his reference to the right hand and the obvious progression of sexual sin that Jesus describes. He moves from thinking about a woman lustfully, to looking at a woman lustfully, to your hand causing you to sin… the assumption is lustfully masturbating. This is, however, vague and inconclusive.

Equally vague and inconclusive is Paul’s mention in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 that the immoral man sins against his own body. Some might argue that he is speaking of masturbation because it is the only type of sexual immorality that a man performs without another person present. Again, this is a weak argument because it does not take into account the immediate context. Paul could easily be talking about lust in general, not masturbation specifically.

Because of the silence of the Bible on the issue, many try to argue that masturbation is not a sin if it is done without lust. One might question whether this is even possible, and rightly so. This is very indicative a fact value split in which a person tries to separate the physical act of masturbating from the mental act of lust that accompanies it. If masturbation without lust is possible, then it would be reasonable to say that it is not a sin, but I am unwilling to make that concession. At the very least, I know that I can’t do it.

In the end, masturbation does not fit in the biblical model of good, moral sex, because it does not involve one man and one woman coming together and becoming one. Instead, it drives a man further away from his spouse and segregates him. Thus, masturbation should be considered sexually immoral and not acceptable behavior for a Christian.

# Pornography

If the conclusion of the last section may be accepted, it is obvious that the use of pornography is unacceptable. If masturbation is a sin, pornography is also, because the purpose of pornography is masturbation. Even if the previous conclusion is not acceptable, pornography consumption is still unacceptable behavior for a Christian. It is the epitome of lust. Lust is clearly condemned in the Bible in many of the passages listed above. The bible is so clear on the issue of lust that the question of pornography consumption is a complete non-issue because its purpose is to incite lust.

## My own plan

I intend to maintain sexual purity by following these guidelines and abstaining from sexual activity until I am married. When I am tempted to lust I will turn that temptation over to the power of Christ and make it obedient to him. This is something that I already practice as I have had to overcome a pornography addiction in the past. I still stumble and lust on occasion, but I repent of those sins when they occur and turn to the saving work of the cross for strength in the fight to maintain sexual purity.

The best verse I have ever memorized to help in this constant battle is 1 Corinthians 10:13. “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape, so that you will be able to endure it.” This verse has reminded me many times to resist the temptation to sexual sin and pursue holiness.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, sex is a gift from God intended to bring one man and one woman into an intimate union. It is a strong bonding agent that is meant to seal a commitment of marriage made between a man and woman. If the sexual activity that a Christian is practicing does not fit into this paradigm, it is not good for that Christian and the sexual activity should be ceased. Actions such as premarital sex, homosexual sex, pornography consumption, masturbation, and adultery are simply sinful and should be avoided at all costs by the maturing Christian.