

What the Bible Says about Sex

by Jerry A. Collins

- *What is the nature of sexual relations for us today?*
- *When is it right and/or wrong to participate in sex?*
- *How can we exercise control of our sexual urges?*

God's direction to *be fruitful and multiply* (Genesis 1:28) may be the only command we have ever kept. But that is not all we have done with our sex drive. Sex does not just fill the earth with children of married couples. Sex produces gossip, arguments, divorce, depression, suicide, murder, and rape. Sex causes unwanted pregnancies, unwanted affairs, and unwanted social situations which lead to all kinds of others sins like bitterness, hatred, malice, and revenge. Unbridled sexual urges have brought exploitation, captivity, abuse, and shame. These sexual urges have led to incest, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and prostitution—all of which are condemned in the Bible (Leviticus 18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:3-6). Sex is the God-given means by which we are fruitful and multiply, and it creates romance, which leads to marriage (Song of Solomon). But it has also been one of the most destructive forces in human existence.

God has placed boundaries around this incredible force in our lives to keep it from destroying our lives and to ensure the proper purpose for it. This brochure will attempt to explain the nature of sex today and identify the boundaries God has placed on it.

Sex in the Beginning

In the beginning, sex was not the command of God. God's original command to Adam was, *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it ...* (Genesis 1:28). While sex would be necessary to do that, sex was not the focus of this command. After Eve was created, Adam 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* (Genesis 2:23). Here Adam expressed his appreciation for and acceptance of Eve, but once again, sex is not the focus. There most likely was no need for a command to have sex with Eve since living with a perfect partner in the middle of a secluded garden was enough to do so.

In Genesis 2:25, we read, *And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed*. God gave Adam and Eve their sexual nature, and yet there seems to be little evidence that they had sex before the Fall or had made it the focus of their relationship with each other. While they may have had some sort of sex drive, it could not be described with the kind of intensity that has corrupted it for us today.

After their sin, however, we read, *then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed figs leaves together and made themselves loin coverings* (Genesis 3:21). It was not until after they had sinned, were thrown out of the garden, and were too ashamed to not wear clothes, that we read for the first time, *Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain* (Genesis 4:1).

While the evidence of a sex drive is slim before the Fall, there is plenty of evidence for it after the Fall. The sex drive we know of today tends toward excesses which are cursed, just like every other human urge. So our sex drive today is not the same gift from God that it was for Adam and Eve before the Fall. Instead, it is a cursed drive that we must control within biblically defined boundaries.

Sex In the Bible

Sex was God's idea and is part of His plan for the human race. The Bible teaches us the boundaries God expects us to honor when it comes to controlling our sexual urges.

1. The sex drive is perverted, and we are warned that it must be kept under control.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God, and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity but in sanctification. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

It is God's will that His people be holy in their lifestyles, becoming set apart from sin and dedicated to God. Keeping one's sexual urges under control is essential for holiness. Three statements in this passage, each beginning with the word that instruct us on how we should control these sexual urges.

First, *that you abstain from sexual immorality*. The idea is to avoid and not engage in any form of sexual activity that deviates from God's revealed will in the Bible. That would include premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, incest, and bestiality (Leviticus 20:10-16; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10; and Matthew 19:3-12).

Second, *that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor*. The way to avoid sexual immorality is by learning how to control the sexual urges of one's own body. Sexual self-control is something that can be learned. The method of control should be both holy and honorable, unlike the self-indulgent perversions of the world.

Third, *that no man transgress and defraud his brother in this matter*. Uncontrolled sexual passions involve other people in behavior that is sinful and also makes them accountable to God.

So, controlling our sexual urges is not only necessary for us personally but also for our relationships. The Bible is quite clear about the need to control our perverted sex drive (Romans 13:13-14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 6:13-20; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-12; Colossians 3:5-7; 1 Peter 4:1-5).

2. Sex in marriage is God's way of controlling our perverted sexual urges.

... it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 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. 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 (1 Corinthians 7:1-7).

First we learn that a man should not touch a woman. This would include any kind of a touch that can lead to sexual desires. Second, the command for a man and woman to have sex in marriage is because of immorality. In other words, sexual relations within marriage are a preventative for sexual immorality outside of marriage, and both the husband and wife are responsible for this to one another. Third, do not deprive one another of sex beyond your point of self-control. Sex is a drive that must be controlled, but there is a limit to that control. That limit is within marriage and must be maintained by married partners. So God's answer for controlling our sexual urges is within a lifelong marriage relationship between a man and woman (Hebrews 13:4). This is the only kind of safe sex there is. Any other sexual practice is sinful and will be judged by God (Proverbs 6:27-29; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Peter 1:13-17).

What to Do about Sex

There are some things that can help us control our sexual urges:

- (1) Avoid obvious sexual stimulation, like pornography, sexual movies, petting, or lingering looks. All of this makes it harder to remain pure, making it very difficult to control your sexual urges (2 Samuel 11:1-5).
- (2) Avoid being alone with a member of the opposite sex as much as possible. Don't think that it is only a friendship. It may not be true for at least one of you (Genesis 39:7-12).

- (3) Enjoy sexual relations with your marriage partner and become sexually satisfied with each other (Proverbs 5:15-19).
- (4) Sex with someone who is not your spouse is one of the worst kind of sins that brings serious consequences (2 Samuel 12:10; 1 Corinthians 6:13-17). You may have been born with sexual urges, but these urges need to be controlled. It will be difficult, but if you don't, it will destroy you (Proverbs 6:26).

Questions and Answers

Q: *What is the nature of sexual relations for us today?*

A: Our sexual urges are perverted by the Fall of Adam and Eve and need to be brought under control within clearly defined biblical boundaries.

Q: *When is it right and/or wrong to participate in sex?*

A: Sex within marriage is right. Any sexual activity that deviates from God's revealed will in the Bible is wrong. That would include premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, incest, and bestiality. In other words, sexual practices outside of a lifelong marriage of a man and a woman.

Q: *How can we exercise control of our sexual urges?*

A: Avoid sexual stimulation. Avoid being alone with the opposite sex. And become sexually satisfied with your marriage partner. There is nothing easy about it! But understand—if you don't control your sex drive, it will destroy you. Remember Joseph's response to Potiphar's wife was to flee (Genesis 39:7-12).