

I Corinthians 7:1-6
The Sexually healthy marriage

- American suffers from two unhealthy postures toward human sexuality.
 1. We have a "shame based" attitude that comes in part from a distorted Christian view through the Roman Catholic tradition. This makes it difficult for some of us to talk openly about anything sexual.

The earliest known papal decree, issued by Pope Siricius in 386, attempted (without much success) to forbid church elders from making love with their wives. Scholar Reay Tannahill says that early Christian leaders made sex and "sin" synonymous. "It was Augustine who epitomized a general feeling among the church fathers that the act of intercourse was fundamentally disgusting," she says. "Arnobius called it filthy and degrading, Methodius unseemly, Jerome unclean, Tertullian shameful, Ambrose defilement."

Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* (Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.: Stein & Day, 1980), p. 141

Episcopal priest Raymond Lawrence wrote in a national United Methodist journal: "The churches are in danger of evolving into havens for the sexually suppressed or, worse, communities of profound hypocrisy."

Quarterly Review, Summer 1985.

2. We have an obsessive appetite for the sexually promiscuous. Marital sex seems not so interesting as illicit sex in popular media.
- This text provides some of the guidelines that should correct popular misconceptions in our culture about what the Bible teaches about sex in marriage.
 - Sexual activity is not evil or disgusting.
 - Sexual activity is not just for procreation or recreation.
 - Sexual activity is not necessary for health or happiness.
 - Sexual activity has a moral context defined by its God given purposes.
Promiscuity is recreational sex with multiple partners outside the covenant of marriage.
 - Sexual activity is more than physical. It has a spiritual dimension.
 - For more material see apptoteach.org theology file #408, #413

A. While we are all sexual beings, we need not all be sexually active to be healthy.

“¹ Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

Gen.2:18 “It is not good that the man should be alone.”

- We all have a longing for an intimate deeply connected relationship with someone who will complement us as sexual beings.
- What has changed is that it is now possible to be married and still feel alone. This makes illicit sexual contacts tempting.
- It is also true that one can be deeply fulfilled without a sexually active life. The popular notion that sexual activity is a necessity for happiness does not explain the fact that many people (for various reasons) are celibate, healthy, and happy.

- In a promiscuous culture there are some things worse than loneliness - idolatry.
- We will find ourselves "groaning" with nature awaiting our full adoption. **Rom.8:18-25**
- Paul will suggest in other passages that our hunger for intimate relationship can and should be satisfied (in part) within our spiritual union with Christ. (vs.32-35)

B. Sexual activity is about belonging to and fulfilling one's mate (not one's self).

² But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ³ Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

- **Sex is a very important part of our lives.** It should not be marginalized. When a marriage is sexually satisfying it gets about 10% of our attention. When it is not, it gets about 80% of our attention (Dr. Phil). It is not surprising that the Biblical text speaks often of human sexuality and does so great candor and without embarrassment.
- **Sex is about belonging to another.** In marriage both husband and wife are united in an intimate covenant that is celebrated in their sexual union.
- **Sex is about fulfilling one's mate.** This may seem strange to our culture with its obsession with individual rights and autonomy. Our sexual drives are to be directed toward giving not getting, toward pleasing and not being pleased. It is this posture, which brings the deepest sense of fulfillment.

C. There is no "double standard" in the Kingdom of God.

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.}

- **We do not have authority over our own bodies.** This is seems like a strange concept to Western culture where individualism is a core principle. There certainly are circumstances where exceptions apply - physical and emotional manipulation, abuse. The challenge for many is to know when to blow the whistle and leave an abusive relationship.
- **There is no double standard.** Men and women have different ways of expressing themselves sexually but they do not differ in their need to sexually give and receive in a marital relationship.

D. Sexual conflicts in marriage are to be resolved by negotiation, common sense, and flexibility.

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. ⁶ But this I say by way of concession, not of command."

- Sexual differences often come from selfishness.
- Sexual differences should be negotiated.
- We bear some responsibility for our mate's spiritual health.

- Sexual health is less about physical than spiritual/psychological issues.

Inner life

Communion (intimacy)

Commitment (caring)

Surface issues

Chemistry (sexual attraction)

Cooperation (peace)

E. The point

Human sexuality is to find its expression in a healthy marriage where husband and wife give their lives in service of the other, both physically and spiritually.