

Sex in Marriage

INTRODUCTION

A topic that's both important and awkward.

PERSPECTIVES ON SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. Cultural: greatest or grodiest?

2. Familial: parental example and instruction

"My son, pay attention to my wisdom; listen closely to my understanding 2 so that you may maintain discretion and your lips safeguard knowledge" (Prov. 5:1–2).

3. Biblical

"This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame" (Gen. 2:24–25).

"The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain" (Gen. 4:1).

- a. The word the Holy Spirit chose for sex (יָדָע)
- b. "One flesh" — not merely recreation but relationship
- c. Sex is a picture of the union.
 - As many different moods to sex as there are to a relationship.
 - The thermometer of marriage, not the thermostat.
- d. The aspect of union that sex reflects most particularly: vulnerability made safe.

"Now in response to the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband. 3 A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. 4 A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (1 Cor. 7:1–5).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 16

Scary . . . but safe through love.

When vulnerability is held in trust, marriage is wonderfully sweet—and sex pictures that better than any other aspect of the relationship.

“How beautiful you are, my darling. How very beautiful! Your eyes are doves” (Song 1:15).

The goal of sex is to give expression to the secure love that is the marriage union.

Implications for a husband.

“Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

Implications for a wife.

“In my bed at night I sought the one I love; I sought him, but did not find him” (Song 3:1).

PROPRIETY OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. **God’s design for marriage includes a “one-flesh” sexual union between a man and a woman.**

“Everything is permissible for me,” but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ “Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will do away with both of them. However, the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. ¹⁵ Don’t you know that your bodies are a part of Christ’s body? So should I take a part of Christ’s body and make it part of a prostitute? Absolutely not! ¹⁶ Don’t you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For Scripture says, The two will become one flesh. ¹⁷ But anyone joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 16

2. Sex is intended to be a physical expression of a broader union within the marriage relationship.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband” (Eph. 5:25–33).

3. Sexual union is only intended to be experienced within the covenant of marriage.

“For this is God’s will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality, 4 that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not with lustful passions, like the Gentiles, who don’t know God. 6 This means one must not transgress against and take advantage of a brother or sister in this manner, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you. 7 For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness” (1 Thess. 4:3–7).

4. God gave us marital sex for our enjoyment.

“Oh, that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your caresses are more delightful than wine” (Song 1:2).

“Let your fountain be blessed, and take pleasure in the wife of your youth. 19 A loving deer, a graceful doe—let her breasts always satisfy you; be lost in her love forever. 20 Why, my son, would you lose yourself with a forbidden woman or embrace a wayward woman?” (Prov. 5:18–20).

“Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. 3 They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 since it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer” (1 Tim. 4:1–5).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 16

5. Sexual pleasure is not intended to be an end in itself.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31–32).

6. One of God’s purposes for sex in marriage is to bear children.

“God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth . . .” (Gen. 1:28).

“Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, offspring, a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one’s youth. 5 Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them. They will never be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the city gate” (Ps. 127:3–5).

7. Sexual love should be Christ-like in its expression.

Improper expressions include:

- Adultery (extramarital sex)
- Fornication (premarital sex)
- Homosexuality
- Bestiality
- Polygamy
- Self-centered sexual expression (i.e. masturbation)
- Pornography
- Immodesty with regard to dress

PURPOSES OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. The *preservation* and enhancement of the marital bond (relational purpose).
2. The *procreation* of the human race (biological purpose).
3. The *purity* of one another (moral purpose).
4. The *pleasure* of one another (recreational purpose).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 16

PRINCIPLES OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. Sexual relations in marriage are holy and good.
2. Pleasure is not forbidden, but it is assumed.
3. Sexual pleasure is to be regulated in that sex does not exist for my pleasure but for the pleasure and satisfaction of my spouse.
4. Sexual relations are to be equal and reciprocal.
5. Sexual relations ought to be regular and continuous.
 - a. Enough to satisfy the spouse's need.
 - b. Enough to avoid temptation.

“Tender words and tender play, throughout the day, are the best foreplay.”

PROBLEMS WITH SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. Shame

“For it stands in Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame” (1 Pet. 2:6).

2. Embarrassment

Sex as a pathway to worship (1 Tim. 4:4–5).

Desire as a command (Prov. 5:18–19).

Educate your taste for beauty!

Are there restrictions in what we may do as a couple? Three thoughts:

- a. In your expression of sexuality, there may be some things that are harmful or unnatural. Be of the mind that you will not harm or hurt your spouse.
- b. Love demands that you don't selfishly demand that your spouse do something they do not want to do.
- c. If you can't do it in faith with a clear conscience, don't do it. We do not want to force our spouses to go against conscience.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 16

3. Broken trust

When vulnerability no longer feels safe, your whole marriage will suffer—but nowhere will that be more apparent than in sex, where you are at your most vulnerable.

“Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers” (Heb. 13:4). What kinds of infidelity destroy trust?

Trust: the reason sex gets better with time.

4. Selfishness

The massive damage that selfishness in sex creates in a marriage.

- Using sex as a weapon.
- Wanting sex but never wanting children.
- Selfishness that *looks* unselfish.

“Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18).

5. Busyness

“Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:5).

PURITY OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. Enjoy one another: *Marriage is faithfully protected in the context of a conscientious commitment—a commitment of jealous delight and devotion—to sexual purity.*

- a. Maintain “visible sexual devotion” to one another, so that all can see.

“When Isaac had been there for some time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from the window and was surprised to see Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah” (Gen. 26:8).

“[I condemn] the disposition of such husbands as have no heat, or heart of affection in them . . . a disposition no way warranted by the Word. The faithful saints of God . . . were no Stoicks, without all affection: nor did they think it a matter unbeseeming them, after a peculiar manner to delight in their wives (witness Isaacs sporting with his wife:) for this is a privilege which appertaineth to the estate of marriage” (William Gouge),

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 16

“That the Husband tenders his Spouse with an indeared affection above all mortal creatures: This appeareth by the expressions of respect, that all he hath, is at her command, all he can do, is wholly improved for her content and comfort, she lies in his Bosom, and his heart trusts in her, which forceth all to confess, that the stream of his affection, like a mighty current, runs with full Tide and strength” (Thomas Hooker).

“Mating, though not the whole nor the heart of the matter, is a necessary and important expression of wedded love, which would be maimed and stunted without it. Accordingly, . . . there must be no holding back on either side at this point” (J. I. Packer).

- b. Maintain strict propriety in relationships with members of the opposite sex.

“The man whose heart is endeared to the woman he loves, he dreams of her in the night, hath her in his eye and apprehension when he awakes, museth on her as he sits at table, walks with her when he travels and parlies with her in each place where he comes” (Thomas Hooker).

- c. Maintain a watch over your heart, guarding your heart, your eyes, your thoughts against any defiling influences.

“Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life” (Prov. 4:23).

“When you are looking on the cup, or gazing on alluring beauty, or wantonly dallying and pleasing your senses with things unsafe, you little know how far beyond your intentions you may be drawn, and deep the wound may prove, how great the smart, or how long and difficult the cure” (Richard Baxter).

- d. Maintain pure attachments.

“As a wife deales with the letters of her husband that is in a farre Country; she finds many sweet inklings of his love, and she will read these letters often, and daily; she would talke with her husband a farre off, and see him in the letters. Oh (saith she) thus and thus he thought when he writ these lines, and then she thinkes he speaks to her againe; she reads these letters only, because she would be with her husband a little, and have a little parley with him in his pen, though not in his presence” (Thomas Hooker).

2. Entertain no options: *Marriage is faithfully preserved in the context of a no-quit diligence.*

“Like a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the young women” (Song 2:2).

“The wife is ordained for man: like a little Zoar, a city of refuge to fly to in all his troubles: and there is no peace comparable unto her but the peace of conscience” (Robert Cleaver).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 16

“There is no society more near, more entire, more needful, more kindly, more delightful, more comfortable, more constant, more continual, than the society of man and wife, the main root, source, and original of all other societies” (Thomas Gataker).

“A good wife being . . .

The best Companion in Wealth;

The fittest and readiest Assistant in worke;

The greatest comfort in crosses and griefes; . . .

And the greatest Grace and Honour that can be, to him that hath her” (Thomas Gataker).

3. Enliven the routine.

Marriage is faithfully preserved in the context of loving creativity, imagination, and spontaneity.

“Catch the foxes for us—the little foxes that ruin the vineyards—for our vineyards are in bloom” (Song 2:15).

CONCLUSION

1. For those who aren't married:

- Shape your expectations.
- Look for a marriage partner, not a sexual partner.
- Expose false teaching.

2. For those who are married:

- Desire the real thing.
- Sex is a marriage-long project.
- Build a marriage that is vulnerable, and where vulnerability is safe.

“Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on the one she loves? I awakened you under the apricot tree. There your mother conceived you; there she conceived and gave you birth. 6 Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death; jealousy is as unrelenting as Sheol. Love's flames are fiery flames—an almighty flame! 7 A huge torrent cannot extinguish love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If a man were to give all his wealth for love, it would be utterly scorned” (Song 8:5–7).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON:

- Read “Reclaiming Your Eyes from Pornography” by Kole Farney at bulletininserts.org/reclaiming-your-eyes-from-pornography
- Read “Christian Romance Novels: Are They Our Harmless Little Secret?” by Susan Verstraete at bulletininserts.org/christian-romance-novels-are-they-our-harmless-little-secret