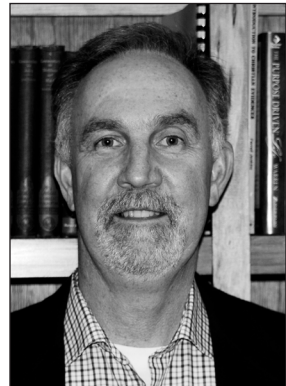


Restoring a Wholesome View of Sex

Wayne Galloway

The Genesis story opens with the Creator before a dark canvas. Six days later the splendor is breathtaking. Light and life have come together in magnificence. His glory has emerged from darkness. He breathed into man the breath of life. But something was lacking. God said, “It is not good.” And so, the brush returned to the canvas for one last stroke. It was unlike all previous strokes—so delicate, so complex. He fashioned a woman. Not just another creature. He fashioned a whole new relationship—an expression of the Creator’s own nature. So blessed it must be held in honor among all (Heb. 13:4). But the beauty of the painting was soon marred. It became grotesque. Dirty. Repulsive. Guilt, shame, and blame-pinning now marred the canvas. Innocence and open trust were transformed into stone walls of self-protection. What went wrong? How do we restore a wholesome view of sex? In the course of this study an attempt will be made to get a glimpse

Wayne T. Galloway, L.M.F.T. is a husband, father and preacher of the gospel. He earned an M.A. from Cincinnati Christian University in New Testament Studies and an M.S. from Wright State University in Marriage and Family Counseling. He completed an internship in Marriage and Family Counseling at Good Samaritan Hospital’s Counseling and Treatment Center in Dayton, Ohio and later worked at the Dayton Institute for Family Therapy. He has been preaching for the past 39 years and currently serves as one of the elders at the Fort Logan church in Stanford, Kentucky. He has worked with this congregation for the past 22 years. He makes regular preaching trips to Colombia, South America where much of his teaching has involved marriage and family issues. Wayne and his wife, Phyllis, have been married for 39 years. They have two sons, Dan (wife, Jenny), who serves as a deacon with the Fayette church in Lexington, Kentucky and Dave (wife, Lauren), who preaches for the Rocky Point Road church in Memphis, Tennessee. They have four grandchildren: Max, Ella, Bryn and Cohen.



into current conditions in the world of sexuality. The counterfeit culture of sexuality will be contrasted and compared to the authentic sexuality revealed in Scripture. Emphasis will be on tracing the design of sexuality back to the creation and finding in God's special relationship with His people a model for sexuality. In the last portion of the study, suggestions will be made for integrating the design of creation and the divine model into society so that there can be a restoration of a wholesome view of sex.

Current Conditions in the World of Sexuality

Our culture appears chaotic and disoriented as it struggles to evolve sexually. Nowhere is this more evident than in the modern "hookup culture." In an article published by the American Psychological Association, Garcia, Reiber, Massey and Merriwether reviewed the literature on this subject. They stated, "Hookups are becoming progressively more engrained in popular culture, reflecting both evolved sexual predilections and changing social and sexual scripts" (2012). What is "hooking up"? A "hookup" is a brief uncommitted sexual encounter among individuals who are not romantic partners or dating each other. Traditional forms of courting and pursuing a romantic relationship have shifted to "just having sex."

Garcia states, "Among heterosexual emerging adults of both sexes, hookups have become culturally normative" (2012). The article identifies various evidences of this approach in popular media including television, music and books in which premarital and uncommitted sex are presented as both physically and emotionally enjoyable in this "no strings attached" approach.

Even though popular media presents hookups as physically and emotionally enjoyable, statistical evidence reveals liabilities associated with this culture. In a study of 681 emerging adults, 63% of college age men and 83% of college age women preferred a traditional romantic relationship as opposed to an uncommitted sexual relationship (Garcia, 2010). For many then, it seems that they are not doing what they prefer. This may be related to their feelings after the hookup.

In a study of 187 participants reporting their feelings after a typical hookup, 35% reported feeling regretful or disappointed, 11% reported feeling confused, 7% felt excited or nervous and 5% felt uncomfortable (Paul and Hayes). The negative consequences of hookups include emotional and psychological injury, sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections and/or unintended pregnancy. However, in a study of 71 college students (39

women and 32 men) nearly half were unconcerned with contracting a sexually transmitted infection (Downing-Matibag and Geisinger).

Most reported not considering or realizing their own health risks during hookups. This is in spite of the fact that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that there are almost 20 million new infections in the United States each year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Fact Sheet). Even though adolescents and young adults make up only a quarter of the population, they account for about half of all new infections each year. These infections cause everything from chronic pain, high risk pregnancy, cancer, genital warts, liver and nervous system disorders, to in some cases, brain damage and even death.

Several studies address the psychological and emotional impact of hooking up. In one Canadian study, 78% of women and 72% of men reported experiencing regret following such an encounter (Fisher, et al.). D. Freitas says the hookup culture is leaving a generation unhappy, sexually unfulfilled and confused about intimacy.

Donald Joy in his books *Bonding* (1985) and *Re-bonding* (1986) contended, “God made no plan for multiple partners, double or triple bonding” (*Re-bonding*, 65). Joy reasoned that each sexually intimate experience results in the creation of an emotional and relational bond. The more sexual partners one has, the greater the emotional ramifications. “Hooking up” literally inhibits the brain’s ability to connect in long-term attachment relationships. In each new sexual experience a person gives a little of him or herself to the bond. In recognition of this, one young lady in counseling observed that she always held back a little of herself. She said, “I never kiss them.” In all her attaching and reattaching she had diminished herself. Like a Post-it-Note used and reused she recognized she was losing her ability to stick. For her to kiss one of her sexual partners would mean that she would have completely and thoroughly diminished herself and her ability to bond in a relationship.

The chaotic state of sex in our culture is marked by adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bi-sexuality, bestiality, pederasty, pornography, childhood sexual abuse, prostitution and the sex trade business. According to Kathy Stout-Labauve in an article in *Christian Counseling Today*, more children, women and men are held in slavery right now than over the course of the entire trans-Atlantic slave trade that took place from the mid-1400s to the Civil War. Eleanor Goldberg reports 29 million people are living in slavery.

Their labor and even their bodies are seen as the casual property of an owner. Victims are often forced to toil in destitute conditions by those who sell fellow human beings into slavery and sexual bondage. Human trafficking has become a \$32 billion annual industry—a travesty of epic proportions where nearly two million children are exploited in the commercial sex industry.

How Did We Get Into This Condition?

Many observe a change beginning in the 1960's and the rise of the Playboy philosophy in the United States, but the fact is our condition is not new. Both ancient and modern cultures have struggled to make sense of their sexuality (see Marilyn B. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*; Ken M. Campbell, ed. *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*; and Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage*). The Bible, of course, confirms the same, reporting accounts about Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), the Benjaminites raping a woman to death (Judg. 19-20) and people given over to sexual impurity, degrading passions and indecent acts (Rom. 1).

Just as in times past, the current situation arises as a result of not acknowledging God and thus not honoring His way (Rom. 1:28). One could talk about the general theory of evolution, about the undermining of the authoritative nature of Scripture associated with theological liberalism, about the soft approach that people take to the Bible, but it is all the same: turn away from the Lord and it has moral effects resulting in chaos.

Daniel R. Heimback in *True Sexual Morality* (253-310) identifies four different worldly ways of thinking: romantic sexual morality; playboy sexual morality (sex as pleasure); therapeutic sexual morality (sex as wholeness); and pagan sexual morality (sex as spiritual life). The discussion here will be limited to the first two areas as the ones most problematic to the conservative Christian perspective.

It is a common perspective to approach sexual morality on the basis of romantic feelings. In other words “sex is right if we have romantic feelings for each other.” In 1977 Debby Boone sang, “It can’t be wrong when it feels so right” (“You Light Up My Life”). Sexual relationships and marriages are constructed around feeling—being in love. Separation and divorces occur when people fall out of love—meaning, “I’ve lost that lovin’ feeling,” and “it’s gone, gone, gone” (The Righteous Brothers, “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feelin’). Carole King explained, “It’s too late, baby” because “something inside has died” (“It’s Too Late”).

This view takes a fairly positive approach to marriage. But it should be initiated only on the basis of this romantic feeling. A marriage may be cast aside if that romantic feeling diminishes or such romantic feelings are felt for someone else. Like some have said, “I know God just wants me to be happy.” Translation: God wants me to experience romantic feelings. The sexual relationship is exclusive, but only while feelings last. So commitment is to the feeling rather than to a particular individual. Romantic affection validates sex. The same argument may be used to validate same sex marriage.

There are powerful chemicals involved in this feeling: testosterone, estrogen, nitric oxide, pheromones, serotonin, dopamine, epinephrine, norepinephrine, vasopressin, oxytocin and phenylethylamine. They have an intoxicating effect on the brain and on our emotions. But these effects cannot be maintained indefinitely. Like cocaine, they powerfully impact the pleasure centers. But, also like cocaine, there is a diminishing effectiveness over time (Childerston). If romantic affection is the standard we use in determining the morality of sex, we are doomed to chaotic and erratic highs and lows, short-lived feelings and the depressing downs of broken relationships. If one is looking for something more meaningful and deeper, it is out of reach if there is dependence on mere feelings.

The Playboy philosophy bases sexual morality on the pleasure principle. Jon Davis and Gerard Loughlin state,

Sex is about pleasure, not love; passing time—excitedly—with a friend, acquaintance or stranger, without commitment or hurt.... Its goal is not procreation... but... the glow of successful performance. Sex is like food, a commodity, and the culture in which it is bought and sold a veritable pornotopia (p. 8).

Heimback remarks,

Playboy sexual morality begins with the physical pleasure associated with sexual experience and proceeds to construct an entire framework of moral thinking based on it. The experience of physical pleasure is treated as a self-justifying ultimate good that determines the morality of everything else in life. Nothing is higher than the sensation of physical pleasure, and the value of everything else depends on it. By this criterion, sex that produces physical pleasure is always right, and no sexual act is wrong unless it fails to produce sensual pleasure (270).

There is an obvious connection between this philosophy and the “hookup

culture” discussed earlier. Thus all the liabilities associated with the hookup culture are inherent in the Playboy philosophy. And it is reasonable to ask, “Is there not more to the sexual experience than mere biological pleasure?”

In each of the four worldly ways of thinking identified by Heimbach there is some truth. Here is the “brilliance” of counterfeit ways of thinking. Each has some truth and therefore promises much. Sex does involve a good feeling. Sex does involve physical pleasure. Sex does involve an element of individual wholeness (see Schnarch) and there is definitely a spiritual component. But individually these elements do not do justice to the magnificent complexity of human sexuality. In authentic sexuality there are multiple components dynamically interacting with each other: chemical, biological, individual, social and spiritual. Reducing sex to one component without due consideration of the others is like counterfeit money. It only appears to have the value of the authentic. In the end, it disappoints.

Authentic Sexuality

In response to the various worldly views of sexuality, a proof text approach is often advanced. “This passage forbids homosexual sex. This passage forbids fornication. This passage condemns adultery.” Not only does this approach generally take a negative view when the message of Scripture is very positive, it fails to look at sex in the larger theological perspective. The impression is often left that the biblical approach to sex is “Don’t!” What seems to be merely a list of rules is cited as proof. The meaning behind the rules and understanding why they are there is lost in the heat of debate. High levels of emotion, deadlock, inflexibility, and opposition are the result. This is not a very effective environment for restoring a wholesome view. This section of the study seeks to go behind the proof texts to see our design as rooted in the creation itself. A biblical model of authentic sexuality rooted in covenant loyalty, faithfulness and exclusive devotion will be presented as the theological backdrop for authentic sexuality.

Our Design Is Rooted In Creation

In Matthew 19:4-12 Jesus traced the design of marriage back to the creation. It is obvious that sexuality is a consideration since Jesus addresses marriage, divorce, fornication, adultery, and celibacy in that text. Paul does the same in 1 Corinthians 6:16 as he discusses joining oneself to a prostitute. Following their approach, the following observations can be made from the first chapters of Genesis:

1. We are created in the image of God both male and female (Gen. 1:26-27;

cf. 1 Cor. 11:7). This denotes an ontological equality between men and women, but also denotes an ontological inequality between those created in the image of God and those that are not, i.e. the animals. (Note: “ontological” is defined as “of or relating to essence or the nature of being,” s.v. American Heritage Dictionary, and here refers to the essential similarities and differences between men and women). This has implications regarding bestiality (cf. Lev. 18:23; 20:15-16). Sex with animals is prohibited because of the ontological inequality that exists between them and humans.

2. The woman was created as a “help suitable” for man (Gen. 2:18). This is based on ontological equality, but denotes a functional complementarity. Like the two sides to a pair of scissors they are equal in value, but different in function, accomplishing together what neither can accomplish alone. Such functional complementarity is not achieved in same gender relations (cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13).
3. The man recognized the woman as his female counterpart (Gen. 2:23). God’s validation of this indicates that this is a legitimate recognition.
4. There was a mutuality of relationship recognized in Genesis 2:24-25.
5. They were created in order—the male first and then the female. Although this does not relate directly to our study, Paul does make an observation regarding this fact in 1 Timothy 2:13 regarding women in teaching and exercising authority.
6. The woman was created to meet a deficiency, not the other way around. Paul observes that man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake (1 Cor. 11:9). Animals did not meet this deficiency. Another man did not meet this deficiency (or as former President Reagan put it, “It was Eve, NOT Steve.”).
7. The woman was created from the man, not the man from the woman (cf. 1 Cor. 11:8, 12).
8. The woman was presented to the man, not the man to the woman.
9. The man responded to the creation of the woman, but there is no record of any response by the woman.
10. The woman was named by the man and the woman’s name is derived from the man’s.

11. Leaving father and mother and being joined to a wife involves a transfer of ultimate allegiance from parents to spouse.

There are many implications from these observations involving not just sex, but role relations in marriage based on our gender. While role relations are outside the purview of this study, finding God's design for sex in His creation has far-reaching ramifications. Leviticus 18 focuses attention on many of these sexual ramifications. Interestingly, the passage opens with attention given to contrasting cultures (2-5). First, there is the culture associated with Israel founded on their special covenant relationship with God seen in the phrase, "I am the Lord your God." The repeating of this phrase and its equivalents indicate that these sexual injunctions are a part of Israel's covenant obligation to God. Second, there is the culture associated with the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan. The land of Canaan was "spewing out" the Canaanites (Lev. 18:25) who were "defiling" the land (Lev. 18:25) with their "abominable customs" (Lev. 18:30). God was removing them from the land. Their sexual practices were at least part of the reason. Israel was not to defile themselves by any of these things (Lev. 18:24).

Incest was prohibited. The various relationships that constitute incest are enumerated (Lev. 18:6-18). Approaching a woman during her menstrual impurity was prohibited. Lying with a male as one lies with a female was prohibited. Having intercourse with any animal was prohibited. Leviticus 20:10ff, while defining the penalties for violation of these injunctions, also prohibits adultery. Premarital sex and rape are addressed in Deuteronomy 22.

God defined the reason why Israel was to be distinct. "You shall consecrate yourselves and be holy, for I am the Lord your God, who sanctifies you" (Lev. 20:7-8). "You are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine" (Lev. 20:26).

Unless we recover a sense of the incredible privilege of being a holy people, belonging to the Lord, married to Him in covenant relationship, the objects of His gracious election, His treasured people, set apart exclusively to Him, we will remain pathetic and powerless to face the sexual challenges of our day. The biblical model of appropriate sexual conduct is rooted in covenant loyalty, faithfulness, and exclusive devotion as exemplified in God's relationship to His people. We cannot restore authentic sexuality as long as we ignore its origin in God's relationship to His chosen, and instead look for it in romantic feelings, or in the playboy philosophy, or some other worldly perspective.

Throughout Scripture God represents Himself as the husband, and His chosen people as His wife (e.g. Jer. 3; Ezek. 16 and 23; Hos. 1, 2, 3; Eph. 5:21ff). This imagery is used in the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-10), the parable of the virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), and in Revelation (19:7-8; 21:2). Paul refers to having betrothed the Corinthians to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). The phrase “I will be your God and you shall be My people” is reminiscent of this marriage covenant (Exod. 6:7; Jer. 30:22; 2 Cor. 6:16).

The relationship is defined by God’s unconditional covenant commitment. His grace provides for the necessary flexibility and forgiveness in the relationship and His great power is used to empower His people (Balswick and Balswick, 1990 and 1999). Thus, as these dynamics work together, His people are drawn into intimacy or closeness with Him. His chosen should respond in faithfulness. The exclusiveness of the relationship is emphasized by the condemnation of idolatry as adultery (cf. James 4:4; for further study on this see Ortlund). God is jealous as a husband and the remedy is “drawing near to God” and “purifying the heart” (James 4:7-8). It is interesting to note that “circumcision of the heart” is required of God’s people, denoting their cutting off from the world and enjoining themselves to Him (cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25; Acts 7:51). All forms of counterfeit sexuality including fornication, adultery, hookups, pornography, rape, prostitution, homosexuality, bi-sexuality, bestiality, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, et al., violate these relationship principles (see Balswick and Balswick, 1999 for a discussion of various areas).

Other than Leviticus 18, 1 Corinthians 6:9-7:40 is our single most complete biblical discourse on authentic sexuality. It begins with a contrast between the unrighteousness associated with the culture of the world and contrasts it with the culture of the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Heading the list of actions associated with the culture of the world is “fornication” or “immorality” (*porneia*, actually in the text it is the word *pornoi* denoting those who indulge in fornication). Craig Blomberg says, “This is the broadest term for sexual sin in the Greek language, embracing any form of intercourse between two individuals who are not united in heterosexual marriage” (126). Adultery, effeminate and homosexual behaviors are encompassed within this. Why do these head the list? Is it because of what he is about to say in the next paragraph? Is it because of the intense severity of these violations (cf. Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Tim. 1:8-10)?

Some say that sexual sin is just like all other sins: This is true in that all sin separates one from God and ends in death, but sexual sin seems

especially damaging. It is a sin against the body (1 Cor. 6:12-20) and the body is not for immorality but for the Lord (v. 13). This relates to marriage (cf. 7:2-4) and to our relationship to the Lord. We are married to Him in covenant relationship. A Christian joining himself to a prostitute takes the members of Christ and makes them members of a prostitute. It is a heinous violation of his marriage to Christ. It may be even considered as idolatry (cf. Eph. 5:3-5, and note the placement of “idolatry” between “fornicators” and “adulterers” in 1 Cor. 6:9).

We are one body with Christ. We often think of the church as a group that is the bride of Christ, but 1 Corinthians 6:16ff suggests an individual aspect to this also. If I join my body to a prostitute I have violated the marital body that I share with Christ. Paul founds his reasoning on the creation account: “The two shall become one flesh” (v. 16). We are married to Christ. As the bride of Christ we must not take that which belongs to Him and give it to a prostitute (or any other form of sexual immorality). Such a violation is horrendous! It transgresses the very theology of covenant relationship, grace, empowering, and intimacy. So, he says, “You are not your own” (v. 19c).

Sexual sins can be forgiven as indicated by 1 Corinthians 6:11, but at great price (1 Cor. 6:20). Why would one who has been forgiven return to such sins? Paul concludes, “Therefore glorify God in your body.” 1 Corinthians 7 is about how to do that. Here instruction is given about the discipline associated with our being one body with Christ. There are five major considerations:

1. Marriage is the discipline that God has given. It inhibits immorality. Just as our relationship with Him inhibits sin so our relationship with our spouse inhibits immorality. God’s design is very good. It finds its origin in His exclusive devotion to us in covenant commitment. Thus our marriages to one another are modeled after His marriage to His people. Instead of “dispersing our springs abroad” (Prov. 5:16), instead of chaos, within marriage there is organized creation, new life, and an environment for children to thrive. Immorality, on the other hand, leads to pain, heartache and death. There is only one relationship that trumps marriage—our relationship with God. Thus, by agreement for a time, marital partners may devote themselves to prayer but then come together again. We are in a spiritual battle with Satan and we cannot give him an avenue or he will break our defenses and violate our relationship with God.

2. The unmarried state is good if one has the self-control necessary to

maintain it. Paul recognizes that not all have this gift. Each has his own gift from God. It is not a matter of one gift being more righteous than the other or one gift being holier than the other. It is a matter of recognizing our gift and responding accordingly.

3. *The design is for the married to stay married.* If both are believers they should stay married (vv. 10-11). If a believer is married to an unbeliever they too should stay married (vv. 12-16).

4. *Regarding virgins, Paul says, in light of the “present distress” it is good to remain single, but marriage is an alternative.* Paul intends flexibility to be used in light of his recommendation of singleness. Even though singlehood allows for undistracted devotion to God, one must not act unbecomingly toward a virgin. Does she have the gift of singlehood?

5. *Paul addresses widowhood in verses 39-40.* Observe that lifelong heterosexual monogamy is the design. “A wife is bound as long as her husband lives,” he says. When death occurs she is free to be married “only in the Lord,” but Paul’s opinion is that she is happier if she remains single. He enlarges on this teaching in 1 Timothy 5:11-15 by recommending marriage for younger widows “feeling sensual desires.”

Authentic sexuality is founded upon creation. It finds its model in God’s relationship with His people. He is the husband and His people are His wife. This relationship involves unconditional commitment and self-sacrificing grace and empowerment. For this reason the sexual culture associated with the kingdom of God is radically different from the sexual culture associated with the world. God’s people have been called out from the culture of unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14-18). Hebrews 13:4 states it succinctly: “Let marriage be held in honor by all and let the marriage bed be undefiled for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

Responding to the Problem

In the first part of this study particular attention was given to the “hookup culture” as an illustration of various problems associated with a worldly view of sex. While media presents it as both physically and emotionally enjoyable, the research indicates that it results in emotional and psychological injury, sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancy. The sexual hookup culture is leaving a generation unhappy, sexually unfulfilled and confused about intimacy. Individuals damage their ability to bond in long-term attachment relationships and actually inhibit their ability to create the emotional connections for which they seem to be

longing.

This study did not pursue the details of problems associated with human trafficking in the sex trade business, prostitution, homosexuality, bi-sexuality, bestiality, pederasty, pornography, childhood sexual abuse, fornication and adultery. Many of the individual, personal, and relational problems associated with these behaviors are evident and often more intense than the problems associated with the “hookup culture.” While personal and relational problems are indeed profound, problems also occur on a larger scale.

Some of the problems are societal in nature. There are powerfully negative impacts on the family and on the meaning of family resulting in family deterioration and dissolution. Although not particularly addressed in this study, others have addressed the effects on the economy, the emotional health of children and adolescents, crime and health care (Christensen, 1991). When these problems take root in families they often cascade into a cycle of behaviors that are perpetuated inter-generationally and result in negative long-term societal changes. All of this without even considering the spiritual problems of sin and death.

Just say, “NO!” is not a sufficient response. Quoting biblical passages in proof text format may convey biblical truths, but it is not an adequate response. We may tell a terrorist, “The Bible says, ‘Thou shall not kill,’” but such has no force for one who believes he is accomplishing good and is going to be blessed for his murderous assaults. Prohibitions are necessary, but consideration needs to be given to the positive message of Scripture. Instead of “Just say, ‘No,’” a fitting alternative might be: “Say ‘Yes’ to sexual integrity.”

It is unbiblical to conclude, “This world is not my home, therefore I am just going to bide my time until I escape it.” The Lord God engaged the world in order to save it. Restoration and new creation is the objective of the Creator. He is not willing that any should perish. Restoration is a noble objective. Abandonment is not. We must “rescue the perishing and care for the dying.”

What can be done to move in a positive direction in engaging the world? We need to communicate the positive message of Scripture. Daniel R. Heimback says the Bible promises blessings on moral sex including pleasure, fun, good health, psychological stability, and protection from emotional pain (226ff). He identifies the following four blessings: joy, genuine satisfaction, honor and allure.

Heimback recognizes a difference between pleasure and joy. He distinguishes eight separate differences. Pleasure is temporary; joy is abiding. Pleasure is limited by pain; joy grows and even gets better. Pleasure feels pain; joy transcends it. Rather than pursue all these differences suffice it to say that pleasure is more situational and joy is not about the immediate situation, but about something greater.

God has designed sex to be situationally pleasing AND to result in a long-term joyful and satisfying relationship. Proverbs 5:18-19 says, “Rejoice in the wife of your youth... let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you be exhilarated with an adulteress?” This text emphasizes marriage. It considers pleasure, but goes beyond it to imply joy associated with covenant loyalty. Proverbs 6:24ff speaks of the smooth tongue of the adulteress, her beauty, her eyes—all pleasure oriented. Then it reminds that “on account of her one is reduced to a loaf of bread.” Additional negative consequences are identified throughout the passage, but Proverbs 7:23 seals it by saying, “It will cost him his life.”

Brief pleasure is not worth what it costs! As one wit said, “Sin will take you further than you want to go. It will make you stay longer than you want to stay and it will cost you more than you want to pay.” Instead of paying such high costs, how about enjoying a long-term relationship, growing old together, experiencing children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren? Some do not know what they will miss because they have sacrificed it to momentary pleasure.

Isaiah 62:4-5 connects on the theological level, reflecting on the model of God’s relationship to His people. It will no longer be said to you, “Forsaken,” nor to your land will it any longer be said, “Desolate”; but you will be called, “My delight is in her,” and your land, “Married”; for the Lord delights in you, and to Him your land will be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.

The New Testament presents Christ as enduring the cross for the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2) and the bridegroom lays down His life to present the bride in all her glory without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph. 5:27). Such relationships among humans are not perfect, but with graciousness and forgiveness there is joy and intimacy.

God promises genuine satisfaction to those who follow His instructions. Heimback states, “God awards those who keep his rules on sex with

a powerful sense of well-being, contentment and completion, starting in the soul and affecting every other level—physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual” (233). Moses commended God’s instructions to Israel as they anticipated going over to possess the land of Canaan. He said that God had given His instruction “that it may go well with you and with your children after you” (Deut. 4:40). He said, “The Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always and for our survival” (Deut. 6:24).

Various studies throughout the years have confirmed a connection between satisfying sex and following God’s instructions for sex and marriage. In the 1940s, professors at Stanford University found that women who attend church frequently are more likely to report high sexual satisfaction than women in other categories (Wallin, 1957). A 1975 *Redbook* study surveyed 100,000 women and found that those who were “highly religious” were not only more likely to save sex for marriage but were also more likely to describe their sex life as “very good” (Levin and Levin). *Christianity Today* sampled readers in 1992 and found a connection between premarital abstinence and sexual satisfaction later in marriage. They also found that, among Christians, those who save sex for marriage are less likely to consider divorce (Robinson).

The Family Research Council (Mattox) and the University of Chicago (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels) in separate studies in 1993 including more than 4,500 participants found that couples who keep sex exclusively to marriage report the highest levels of sexual satisfaction, while sexually active singles and couples who allow sex outside of marriage report the lowest.

A survey by the Institute for American Values (Waite, et. al.), published in 2002, found that among couples in “very unhappy” marriages, 80 percent of those who stayed married despite their unhappiness reported having happy marriages five years later. Of those who divorced to find happiness, only 19 percent reported being happy five years later.

God promises honor to those who respect His design for sex. In 1 Samuel 2:30 the Lord says, “Those who honor Me, I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.” Before Adam and Eve sinned, Genesis says they were “naked and were not ashamed” (2:25). Shame was the result of their violation of the will of God (Gen. 3:7). It was not sex that made them ashamed but sin. They recognized that they had dishonored

themselves. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Let marriage be held in honor.”

1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 reflects on this honor as it is associated with the Christian’s special sanctification to God. We are a special people in covenant relationship with Him, holy, separated and set apart to Him. Therefore each of us must “know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.” Proverbs 6:32-33 adds, “The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; he who would destroy himself does it. Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out.”

There is much to be said for loyalty. Marital partners appreciate it. Children appreciate it. Society appreciates it. Even if they did not, God does!

God’s design creates allure. The Bible commends sexual modesty. 1 Peter 3:4 says, “Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.” Sexual modesty is attractive. A worldly culture uses sexual attractiveness to control and to get what one wants. The “easy” ones are looking to fill a void in their own lives. They are the objects of locker room jokes. Those who take advantage of them show them no respect. Those looking for long-term relationships prefer someone different.

In the Song of Solomon 4:12ff the bridegroom refers to his bride as a locked garden. Inside is an orchard containing all manner of choice fruits. There are desirable plants, trees and spices. He describes her as a garden spring of fresh water. When the bride speaks she calls the north and south winds to “breathe out fragrance” from the garden. It is an invitation to the bridegroom to come into the garden and to partake of the choice fruits. He enters (5:1) and gathers myrrh and balsam. He eats honeycomb and honey, drinks wine and milk. The narrator (Is this the Designer of the garden?) validates the experience, “Eat, friends; drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers.” This garden is walled and locked to protect and preserve it.

Such modesty is not about being “odd.” It is not about avoiding something that is dirty, but about protecting, preserving, and guarding that which is so mysterious, powerful, and delicate that it must be treated with respect. It cannot be flaunted, exposed, or made available to every passer-by. It is reserved for the special one. Even the world prefers the expensive “high-class” escort to the “cheap trick” in the back alley. Everyone knows that sex is not appealing if it is cheap and available to just anyone at all. Modesty is not about just saying, “No.” It is about saying, “YES” to something special.

Shame may inhibit our ability to communicate God's positive message. It may be difficult for an adulterer to talk to his/her children about faithfulness. It is difficult for sinners to acknowledge vulnerability. We are embarrassed. While sexual sins may be forgiven (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11), accepting ourselves, our temptations, our vulnerabilities, and our own sins is difficult. We cannot accept the world's "dirty" image of sexuality even though we are marred by it. It is necessary that we accept a biblical image if we are to communicate effectively to our children and to our society.

Conclusion

The beauty of God's painting and the wonder of His garden are marred by the ugliness of sin. What He designed to be the reflection of His covenant loyalty has been adulterated. That which He meant to be so special has been cheapened by counterfeits. Designed to bring pleasure, life, happiness and companionship and to crown the work of creation it is used to destroy, control, and manipulate. To restore it we must return to the Creator and to the creation. We should see His relationship to His people as the theological model of our relationships to one another. We must see the vision that He had in order to restore a wholesome view.

Simply quoting biblical prohibitions alone, while conveying part of the biblical truth, is not enough. God envisions great blessings for those who discipline themselves according to His plan. Our teaching needs to say "Yes, to sexual integrity." First, we need to practice what Scripture teaches. Second, we need to teach our children. Third, we need to engage the world with this positive message.

Indeed, sex can be thrilling on the personal level! But authentic sex goes beyond personal pleasure. Executed according to the plan of God, sex benefits you, your partner, your family, your children, and your society.

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