

Introduction to Christian Ethics Part 2

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for

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Unit #2 – Marital and Sexual Issues

Sexual Intimacy Within Marriage

- When it comes to sexual intimacy within marriage, there is only one special bit of ethical instruction given to guide believers.
- In 1 Corinthians 7 we are told that it is a good thing for a man to remain unmarried, but because of the powerful lure of sexual immoralities, every man should have his own wife and every woman should have her own husband.
- What Paul goes on to say next is that if marriage is the solution to the compelling power of our sexual drive, we who are married must ensure that our marriages do, in fact, provide that needed solution and provide it to both marriage partners.
- A marriage that is sexually unsatisfying to one or both partners is a marriage that fails to meet up to God's design specifications.
- God wants and intends that marriage should meet the sexual needs of both partners.
- Based on what we know of His nature, it is unthinkable that He cares about the needs of men but not about the needs of women.
- He made Eve because of Adam's needs, but He would not, in making her, have neglected or ignored her needs any more than He neglected or ignored Adam's needs.
- It is, however, a very significant problem that individual sexual drives vary significantly in their strength from person to person.
- They also vary for individuals over time.
- Changes in the amount of affection people feel for each other can also influence the desire they feel for intimacy with each other.
- Some who have studied this question say that the intensity of the sexual appetite of men tends to peak in their early twenties or before, while the needs of most women peak in their thirties.
- Some husbands and wives are very well matched in their interest and desire, but some are poorly or even very poorly matched in this area.
- It is often said that men have greater sexual needs than their wives, but there are lots of exceptions to such generalizations.
- There are also couples where the husband has little or no interest in intimacy while the wife is very interested and disappointed in this aspect of her marriage.
- Such differences in desire or interest can become an extremely serious problem for a married couple, whether or not they are believers.
- Couples in this situation are sometimes described as having a sexual compatibility problem.
- Whatever we call them, such differences can turn into a serious ground of dissatisfaction

and unhappiness for one or both partners.

- A person whose needs are not being met in the marriage will be tempted to do what single people are tempted to do under the prompting of unsatisfied needs or desires.
- The unsatisfied person may begin to look for love outside the marriage relationship, or be inclined to welcome or accept it when someone else offers it.
- God is well aware of the seriousness of this difficulty that many married couples find themselves having to deal with.
- So He ensured that practical teaching on how to manage different levels of sexual desire was provided to His people.
- **[READ] 1 Cor 7:3-6**
- The basic principle in this passage is, “*Let both husband and wife fulfill their duty to their partner.*”
- Jewish rabbis recognized this principle and referred to the fulfilling of marital duties as *the service of the bed*.
- At first this seems like a very odd expression, but when you think about it, it makes perfect sense.
- This is one way, and a very important way, in which husbands and wives can serve each other.
- According to this passage, this is a service to which both the husband and the wife have a right, a God-given right.
- This right implies that both partners have a duty to meet their partner’s sexual needs.
- God designed and intended for them to do this, and if either refuses to do so or fails to do so through lack of interest or effort, that person is in rebellion against God’s revealed will.
- As we have already seen, such situations may lead the other partner to sexual temptation and immorality, as may remaining single.
- Paul speaks about the duty of husbands and wives in the strongest possible terms here.
- He says that neither has authority over his or her own body, where refusing to meet the needs of the partner are concerned.
- We might think it predictable that Paul, a man, speaks about the husband’s rights or entitlements in this area.
- But it is really quite remarkable that Paul speaks in identical language about the sexual rights or entitlements of wives.
- Paul uses the word <*exousia*> a word that refers to authority or rights, and in effect, says that neither partner has the right to say no to intimacy.
- Now obviously he is not saying that illness or infection or other such impediments are no excuse when your partner calls.
- Marriage is supposed to be a loving relationship, after all, and there are times when it is unloving to demand or insist.
- But in verse 5 Paul says, “*Stop depriving one another.*”
- The Greek word he uses <*apostereo*> means to deprive in a bad sense or to defraud).
- The verb tense that Paul uses implies that this is happening in some Christian marriages.

- As God's apostle he says that **this must stop.**
- Apart from the sorts of obvious exceptions that don't even need to be mentioned, Paul recognizes only one reason for sexual abstinence.
- That exception is to permit the couple more time to pray together.
- However, abstinence to permit time for prayer together is wrong unless both partners agree to it.
- The need for prayer is not to stand in the way of the need for sexual intimacy.
- Such abstinence, when and if it is agreed to by both partners, must also be a temporary thing, it must not go on and on.
- In verse 6 Paul also makes one more important point about abstinence to permit more time to pray together.
- He says that the idea of *such voluntary temporary abstinence to permit more prayer time is not a command, but a concession made to any couple that may want to do this.*
- In other words, it is permissible for them to do this, but it is not commanded or even encouraged.
- God does not ask or encourage couples to abstain from sexual intimacy so as to pray more together.
- The intent here is to give the sexually disinterested partner no excuse for saying, "*No, I need to pray, instead,*" or "*I think we should pray, instead.*"
- Moreover, Paul says that after such a temporary period of abstinence by mutual consent the couple is to come together again sexually, lest Satan tempt them because of their lack of self-control.

Q: What is this self-control problem he is talking about?

- A:** He is speaking about the self-control problem that one or both partners will have if their sexual needs are not met within their marriage.
- Paul obviously would not sympathize with the idea that a partner's urges or desires may be larger or more demanding than they ought to be, and should be reined in or curbed a bit by the other partner.
 - Any such idea could give the disinterested partner grounds for saying, "*No, you have had enough lately.*"
 - Paul's point is that *it is imperative that all sexual needs or urges be looked after within marriage, so that neither partner will have a motive for seeking sexual fulfillment outside of marriage.*
 - Christians and unbelievers generally place most or all of the blame for adultery on the shoulders of the adulterer.
 - But what Paul is saying here by implication is that the partner who refuses to satisfy a spouse's sexual needs is pushing that spouse into infidelity.
 - Satan delights in such refusals, because they are wonderfully suited to his use in tempting the defrauded partner to seek intimacy outside of marriage.
 - Only God knows how many Christian marriages fail because of the refusal of the so-called innocent party to serve the intimate felt needs of the so-called guilty party.

- But God knows, even if we do not.
 - Jesus says that the married person who divorces a partner when there has been no infidelity causes the divorced partner to commit adultery.
 - “How,” we might ask?
 - Well, in such cases there is a continuing marriage bond, in God’s sight.
 - But in spite of that bond, sexual needs are not being met, so both partners are tempted to seek an outlet for their needs elsewhere.
 - This behaviour would involve them in adultery, because they are still married to each other, even if they don’t understand or care about God’s point of view that they are still married to each other.
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- It would be wrong to leap to the conclusion, based on what Paul is saying here, that meeting a spouse’s intimate needs is being depicted as an unpleasant duty or a heavy burden.
 - Of course, any one of our human responsibilities can be turned into a burden if we let ourselves entertain a sour or grudging attitude toward it instead of getting on with doing it and doing it well.
 - Other Scriptures fill out our understanding and paint a far more positive over-all picture of what God intends the intimate side of marriage to be like for us, and I would like to end this unit on sexual intimacy within marriage on such a positive note.
 - It is not meant to be a matter of duty and obligation.
 - Let’s look at two verses in the book of Proverbs.
 - **[READ] Prov 5:18f and 18:22**
 - It might be objected that these verses both reflect the attitude of men, and they say nothing about whether marriage and intimacy are a good thing for women too.
 - Many of the Proverbs are advice given by an older man to younger men.
 - But if these verses say nothing about the romantic needs or satisfaction of women, there are other portions of Scripture do.
 - The best example of this is found in the love poetry known as the Songs of Solomon.
 - The Hebrew name of this book is *the Song of Songs* meaning *the Best Song*.
 - The Song of Songs portrays sexual intimacy as a joyful and fulfilling experience *for both the man and the woman*.
 - I understand this book to be God’s way of endorsing a romantic and joyful understanding of marriage and sexual intimacy.
 - There is no doubt that God intends marital intimacy to be a source of joy to both partners.
 - He designed into our bodies and our minds the capacity for intense sexual pleasure.
 - Initially, sexual intimacy establishes a marriage in God’s sight, as we saw earlier in this unit.
 - But while it has this initial significance for God, He also intended and designed it to continue to be extremely important for the couple involved.
 - He designed it to have a profound uniting effect on the man and woman over the years.

- He intended it to establish the strongest sort of bond between them.
- Of course sexual intimacy tends to become meaningless for people who sleep around.
- Promiscuity tends to make it less valuable and less enjoyable.
- On the other hand, for the couple who have saved and guarded sexual intimacy for each other, it is special and meaningful.
- Keeping it exclusively for one another strengthens their sense of belonging to one other.
- It builds intimacy and trust.
- It says, "*I am yours and yours alone.*"
- The emotional security that this exclusiveness gives to both partners sets them free, - free to give themselves to each other without reservation.
- It intensifies their enjoyment of their love.
- As the years pass, sexual intimacy within marriage reaffirms and renews the marriage bond, functioning as a kind of glue in the relationship.
- It also serves as a recurring celebration of the marriage bond.

- Over the centuries, there have been some Christian teachers who have suggested that the pleasure of sexual intimacy in marriage was in some way improper or less than honourable.
- But this idea has no basis in the teaching of the Bible.

- **Questions or Comments?**