

GERALD HIESTAND AND JAY THOMAS

SEX, DATING, AND RELATIONSHIPS

A FRESH APPROACH

Sex, Dating, and Relationships: A Fresh Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Searching for Clarity

As he who called you is holy,
you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written,
“You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

THE APOSTLE PETER (1 PET. 1:15–16)

The church is in a bit of a mess when it comes to sexual ethics, and Christian singles are bearing the brunt of it. No doubt things could be worse (just read 1 Corinthians 5:11). But certainly we could be doing better. Much better. The “hook-up” culture, so prevalent on the college campus (and now even in our high schools and middle schools) represents a sea change in sexual mores from even twenty years ago. Sex has become casual, devoid of intimacy; it no longer requires even a pretense of ongoing commitment.

Of course, the church doesn’t endorse the new sexual ethic. And the fact that you have this book in your hands likely means that you don’t endorse it either. But the relentless battering of the promiscuity ram against the gates of Christian virtue can exhaust even devout singles.

And the danger is more subtle than an outright assault on one’s virginity. Many Christian singles today lack a clear, biblical vision for sexual purity and relationships that extends beyond a truncated “don’t have sex” concept of purity. What about oral sex? Fondling? Passionate kissing? Where should the lines be drawn? Perhaps even more importantly, who should draw them? Has heaven left each of us to decide for ourselves? For most Christian singles today, the

boundary lines that quadron off legitimate physical activity from illegitimate sexual activity are too porous to be of much real use in the heat of the moment. It does little good to bar the gate but leave the back door wide open. Surely God intends us to save more than sex for marriage. But what?

That's the primary question we hope to answer in this book.

I KISSED KISSING GOOD-BYE?

The advent of Joshua Harris's book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* marked a pivotal moment for Christian singles across North America.¹ Based on the number of copies sold, it's clear that Harris's push-back against the contemporary evangelical dating scene has been favorably received by many. But not by all. Since the release of Harris's book there has been a steady stream of "pro-dating" backlashes.² Those critical of Harris's conclusions (perhaps some of our readers) decry what they perceive to be a simplistic approach to biblical interpretation and an anti-creational view of human sexuality. In particular Harris's no kissing policy has often come under fire. Does the Bible really teach no kissing before marriage? As one critic put it, such stringent conclusions rely on "decontextualized Pauline pronouncements" (i.e., taking the Bible out of context) and, if not handled carefully, can lead to a modern form of legalism.³ Further, many of these writers are questioning what is perceived to be a fear-based, unhealthy suppression of human sexuality. Better to explore the possibility of marriage, they argue, in a relationship that celebrates romantic love and human sexuality than in one based on rules and limits.

Whether the critiques of Harris's book are fair, the concerns are legitimate. Whatever we conclude about sexual propriety, it's clear that sex is glorious and full of God-exalting potential. Any approach to sexual standards that views sex as an evil to be avoided, rather than a gift to be celebrated, misses the mark and fails to

capture the scriptural ideal. Further, we must not overreach when it comes to establishing scriptural boundaries regarding premarital sexual conduct. Teaching from our own experience is fine, but we must not impose our views upon others in areas where the Bible remains silent.

But God has not been as silent on this issue, as many might think. If you're searching for a biblical, robust view of relationships and purity, let us invite you on a journey—a journey into the heart of purity and the image of God. We will not be searching for an empty moralism—a pharisaical, legalistic list of do's and don'ts. We will not be seeking after an outward obedience devoid of heartfelt submission. We will not be looking to set up mechanisms for self-control as though self-control were an end to itself. On this journey we will be searching for the heart of God, expressed fully in the person of Christ. We will be searching for a Son-exalting purity that is not defined by what it isn't but by what it *is*. Ultimately—though perhaps you didn't realize it—we will be searching for the gospel.

As we hope to show, sex, dating, and relationships find their ultimate meaning in the relationship between Jesus and his people; the former testify to the latter. In other words, sex and relationships are all about the gospel. To miss this central truth, we believe, is not only to miss the whole point of romance and sexuality but also to confuse God's clear boundaries regarding sexual activity between unmarried men and women.

SOME INITIAL ITEMS OF HOUSEKEEPING BEFORE WE BEGIN

But before you dive headlong into this book, we should probably give you a heads-up about a few things. First, this book does not intend to be a comprehensive book on all things “dating.” Though two chapters of this book address the subject of dating (and chapter 7 offers an alternative to contemporary models of dating), the

focus of this book is not really about dating, courtship, or how to find a spouse. We have intentionally limited ourselves to the simple aim of clarifying and applying the Bible's teaching on sexual purity. We touch upon these other topics only as they relate to this central aim. So if you're looking for a list of "The Ten Best First Dates," this isn't that book.

Second, unlike many books on sexual purity, this book does not contain a host of data carefully detailing the repercussions of sexual immorality. An approach to sexual purity that uses the fear of STDs, unwanted pregnancies, and emotional scars as a means of motivating singles to remain sexually pure is based upon the faulty assumption that God's commands exist solely for our own protection. Though it is true that God's commands do often protect us from harm (though not always), Scripture makes quite clear that God's commands are not about what works best for us but about what brings him the most glory. Consequently we will not be relying on the fear factor as we seek to help you strive for a life of purity.

Third, we know many of you come to this book with past regrets. For some of you, you've never been in a relationship that wasn't compromised by sexual sin. It's not our intent to riddle you with guilt. What we offer here is a fresh start. Grace never asks you to go back in time and undo what can't be undone. It calls you to trust Christ as the one who is what you are not, the one who did what you could not, and the one who will help you become what you could never be on your own. For those wrestling against the stranglehold of regret, we hope this book will unleash in you a hunger for the grace-filled freedom of biblical purity. In fact, as we unpack the connection between purity, sex, and the image of the gospel, you will see that purity is all about grace.

Fourth, it's not lost on us that many singles today have children of their own or are heavily involved in the lives of children (serving in your church's junior high ministry, etc.). Much of what we are going to commend in this book is best learned intuitively and

organically through a process of teaching and modeling that begins in childhood. So, if you read this book and you find yourself agreeing with its conclusions, we encourage you to think about how you can be an agent of change in the lives of others, particularly younger children who are looking to you for guidance and leadership in this area. How much better it is to grow the tree straight when it is young than try to straighten a bent tree when it is old. It's our prayer that through this book—its being both read and modeled—God's perspective on sex and purity will once again become normative for the church.

And finally, if this book is to be of any value to you, you must be committed to letting the Bible speak louder than the buzzing background noise of our contemporary evangelical subculture. We're going to be frank here: what we're commending does not fit neatly into the mainstream culture of the church, much less the wider secular culture. But while our perspective is a bit out of step with cultural norms, what we offer here is clear, biblical, and life giving. So gin up your moral courage and press on. We don't believe you'll be disappointed.

CONCLUSION

For too long the church's fuzzy thinking has allowed singles to wander aimlessly in their search for sexual purity. The road is long—longer than when previous generations had to travel it. It is wrought with pitfalls and moral hazards that threaten destruction and death, both literally and spiritually. Yet the fact that you have this book in your hands is an indication that you long to see your life track along the path God has ordained. God longs for this as well, and he promises a good return for your investment of faith.

We may not be right about everything we've written (but who writes a book if he thinks he is wrong?). Regardless, it is our prayer that God will use at least some of what we have written here to help

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clarify the Bible's teaching on sex, relationships, and purity—that the glory and image of the gospel might be seen ever more clearly in the lives of Christian singles. May he turn our very gray world of subjectivity into a black-and-white world of Christ-honoring, grace-filled, sexual purity!

SEX AND THE GOSPEL

Portraying Our Union with the Divine Nature

[Christ is] united to you by a spiritual union,
so close as to be fitly represented by the union of
the wife to the husband.

JONATHAN EDWARDS

Adam, . . . a type of Him who was to come.

THE APOSTLE PAUL (ROM. 5:14 NASB)

On the whole, human beings are fascinated with sex—men and women, young and old, Christians, atheists, and everyone in between. In all cultures, throughout all of history, sexual desire has been one of the greatest motivators of the human will. Men and women throw away their families, houses, money, and land in order to be sexually satisfied. Some are addicted to it. Wars have been fought over it. We compose songs about it, make movies about it, and write stories about it. And this preoccupation with sex is not simply a facet of our fallen nature. Even one whole book of the Bible (the Song of Solomon) is dedicated to celebrating the sexual relationship between the husband and wife.

But have you ever wondered why all the fuss? Why did God create us as sexual people in the first place? We remember learning in science class about the asexual reproduction of single-celled organ-

isms and being grateful that God had chosen a different method of reproduction for humans. The thought of mitosis didn't (and still doesn't) sound as appealing as the method of reproduction that God gave us. We suspect you agree. But why did God choose to create us as sexual beings? He was obviously not tied to a need for sexual reproduction in order to propagate the species. He just as easily could have created humans as asexual creatures that reproduce like amoebas.

Until we understand why God created sex, we will never sufficiently make sense of his commands regarding sexual purity, for his commands always relate to his purposes. So to establish a biblical understanding of sexual purity, this chapter is dedicated to capturing a biblical understanding of sex itself.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION: UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE OF SEX

The primary reason that many of us do not adequately understand sex is that many of us do not adequately understand how sex relates to the gospel. You read that right: sex and the gospel are intrinsically linked. In fact, to understand one is to make sense of the other.

Shocking though this may seem, Scripture expressly states that God created sex to serve as a living portrait of the life-changing spiritual union that believers have with God through Christ. Understanding how sex serves this function is absolutely essential for understanding not only why God created us as sexual beings but also why God commands what he does regarding sexual purity. Ultimately, we will discover that God created the physical oneness of sex to serve as a visible image, or *type*, of the spiritual union that exists between Christ and the church. Though it may seem at first that we are diverging far from the primary topic of sexual purity, you will quickly see the relevance of our discussion.

TYPES IN THE BIBLE

Many of history's greatest theologians built their theology around the idea that the image of God and his purposes could be seen in all facets of human existence. Jonathan Edwards and Augustine were two such theologians. Both men believed God created all of life to serve as visible portraits of invisible realities. To see the love between a father and his son, for example, was to see a reflection of the love between God the Father and God the Son. To see the destruction caused by fire was to see a picture of the wrath of God. To see the creativity of an artist was to see a reflection of the creativity of God.¹

Seeing earthly entities as pictures of divine realities is readily affirmed in much of Scripture. Romans 5:14, for example, describes Adam as a *type* of Christ. The word *type* comes from the Greek word *tupos*, which literally means “blow” or “impression” and refers to the indentation a hammer creates after it strikes wood or metal. Just as an indentation represents that which made it, so too a type points to, or represents, something other than itself. Often translated in the New Testament as “example,” a biblical type is a model or image of Christ and his redemptive work. Adam, then, is a shadow, or an image of Christ. Just as Adam's choice in the garden of Eden had ramifications for his posterity, so too Christ's choice in the garden of Gethsemane had ramifications for his posterity. Thus Adam's existence and actions point us toward that which he represents—namely, Christ and his redemptive work.

Perhaps the clearest example of a type found in the Bible is that of the Passover lamb. A brief recounting of the story of the Passover (found in Exodus 11–12) will help us get a clear sense of how types function in Scripture. As you may recall, the children of Israel spent some time in the land of Egypt. Things were not going particularly well (slavery, oppression, forced infanticide), and so God raised up Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and into the land of promise.

To outfit him for the task, Moses was granted the ability to perform great and wondrous plagues that were intended to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites. Moses confronted Pharaoh, who refused to cooperate, and so plague after plague washed over the land of Egypt. Finally, the Lord told Moses that a final plague was needed—the death of every firstborn son in the land of Egypt—and that with this plague Pharaoh would relent. But this plague was to be different. God would no longer work indirectly through Moses. This plague would be carried out by God himself (Ex. 11:4). Good news, on one hand, but troubling on the other. People of God or not, the Israelites were no better prepared to face a holy God than were the Egyptians. Ironically, they were in need of being delivered from their Deliverer. And so God instructed them to sacrifice a lamb and to take the blood of the lamb and paint it over the door posts of the house.

I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. (Ex. 12:12–13)

And so it happened. The wrath of God fell upon the land of Egypt, but the Israelites were spared from God's just judgment through the blood of the lamb and delivered out of the bondage of Pharaoh's slavery into the land of promise. The typological implications are evident. Just as the children of Israel were delivered through the blood of a lamb, so too we are spared from God's just judgment through the blood of Christ and are delivered out of the bondage of sin's slavery into the heavenly land of promise.

And of great significance for our purposes is the divine intent in all of this. The similarities between the death of the Passover lamb and the death of Christ are no mere happy coincidence.

The children of Israel were instructed by the Lord to celebrate the Passover meal every year as an ongoing reminder of their deliverance from Egypt. But what they didn't know was that the meal also pointed forward—forward to the day when the true Passover Lamb would come. The celebration of the Passover lamb, was, we now see, not really about deliverance from a temporal tyrant. No, it was most fundamentally about Christ. The death of the Passover lamb was a divinely instituted foreshadowing of Christ's redemptive work. Jesus himself, while celebrating the Passover meal with his disciples, connected his pending death with the death of the Passover lamb (Matt. 26:28). And John the Baptist, upon seeing Jesus at his baptism, proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). And most explicitly, the apostle Paul declared Christ to be "our Passover lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Thus a type serves as a prophetic pointer toward a deeper heavenly reality. Scripture is replete with such analogies. Hebrews 11:19 refers to Isaac as a type of Christ, for just as Abraham received him back from certain death, so we too have received Christ back from the dead. The priesthood of Melchizedek, the ancient priest-king of Jerusalem, was a picture of the eternal priesthood of Christ. In Galatians Paul uses the two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael, as representatives of two contrasting covenants (the new and the old). And, as we will see from Scripture, just as the Passover lamb of the Old Testament served as a type, or foreshadowing, of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, so also sex was created by God to serve as a living witness to the gospel. In other words, when we think of sex, we should ultimately think of the gospel.

Perhaps some of you are already thinking, "I've heard that the marriage relationship reflects Christ and the church, but the act of sex itself? Really?"

Really. Let's dive into a key text.

FOR THIS REASON

Ephesians 5:24–32 pointedly describes the sexual relationship within marriage as an image of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the church. As you read the passage, note carefully the significance of the last sentence (v. 32) within its context:²

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

In this passage Paul is discussing the relational dynamics of Christian marriage. And as he gives instruction to husbands and wives about how they are to treat one other, he draws a tight parallel between human marriage and Christ’s relationship with the church. The way Christ treats the church, Paul tells us, serves as the pattern for the way in which a husband is to treat his wife. And the way the church relates to Christ is the way a wife is to relate to her husband. But why is this? By what logic does Paul ask husbands and wives to relate to one another as Christ and the church? The answer is found in verse 32. Human marriage, Paul tells us, “refers to Christ and the church.”³ In other words, marriage is a type of Christ’s relationship to the church. Drawing upon the ancient marriage formula of Genesis 2:24, Paul reveals a mystery (i.e., a previously hidden truth): sexual oneness within marriage was created by God to serve as a

foreshadowing of the spiritual oneness that would exist between Christ and his church. As the great church father Augustine once wrote, “It is of Christ and the Church that it is most truly said, ‘the two shall be one flesh.’”

From Paul’s comments in Ephesians we can see that when a man and a woman come together sexually, in some mysterious way they become one in their flesh (see also 1 Cor. 6:16). Something profound occurs through sexual intercourse. The marriage union is not simply a legal union or a social union, a financial union or a familial union, but rather a union of bodies, a sharing of physical life. Through sex, two people are joined together in the deepest and most wonderful way—so much so that they are said to become one. This is why sexual intercourse is rightly said to “consummate” a marriage.

Marriage is more than sex, but it’s not less than sex. In fact, in the ancient biblical world, sexual union was the primary means by which a man and woman married each other (see, for example, the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah in Gen. 24:67). Unlike today, religious clergy of the ancient world did not *create* a marriage through a formal pronouncement; rather the act of sex itself created the marriage.⁴ Thus, a healthy marriage relationship is the living out of the union that is established through sexual intercourse. (This is why a sexual relationship that occurs outside the context of a marriage relationship is so emotionally destructive. The act of sex, which is meant to initiate and sustain a permanent union of marriage, is broken apart and divorced from its very purpose.)

But herein lies the greatest significance of sex—not what it accomplishes on an earthly plane, but what it images on a divine plane. Sex is not an end in itself; it is a *type* of something higher, pointing to the deeper reality of the gospel. Just as the sacrifice of the Passover lamb in the Old Testament foreshadowed Christ’s atoning sacrifice in the New, so too the physical oneness established through sex foreshadows the spiritual oneness that will exist (and

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which already exists) between Christ and his church at the wedding supper of the Lamb. The New Testament's many references to the church as the "bride" of Christ and to Christ as the "bridegroom" further highlight this parallel between earthly and heavenly union. Additionally, many of Christ's parables use the wedding motif as an illustration of his return and consummate union with the church. And the book of Revelation explicitly refers to the wedding supper of the Lamb as inaugurating the dawn of the eternal age (Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17; see also Matt. 25:1–13).⁵

But it's important to remember which came first in God's mind. God did not pattern the divine marriage after human marriage, but rather human marriage is a foreshadowing of the divine marriage. It's not as though God discovered the connection between sex and the gospel the way a pastor peruses the *Wall Street Journal* for preaching illustrations. No, the connection was purposed before the foundation of the world. As Paul tells us, the sexual oneness of marriage refers to Christ and the church. Just as God ordained the Passover lamb of the old covenant to prophetically witness to the coming sacrifice of Christ, so too God ordained human marriage—from the very dawn of creation—to testify to the coming wedding supper of the Lamb.

REMEMBERING THE GOSPEL

Our spiritual union with Christ is an essential yet often overlooked aspect of the gospel. That lapse is, we believe, the primary reason the contemporary church has largely failed to see the illustrative relationship between sex and salvation. A brief restatement of the gospel is in order.

The good news of salvation is not simply that God has forgiven us but, rather, that through our union with Christ we are born again into his very life—we have become sharers of his nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Forgiveness is indeed a significant aspect of our salvation, but we

must not reduce the saving work of God to simple bookkeeping in the divine registry, cleaning out our account of sins but otherwise leaving us untouched.⁶ Forgiveness cleans the slate, but forgiveness alone is not sufficient for entering the kingdom of heaven.

That last sentence is worth repeating: forgiveness alone is not sufficient for entering the kingdom of heaven. It is only when we understand that our chief culpability before God is not bound up in our sinful actions but, even more fundamentally, in our sinful nature—the source of our sinful actions—that we can begin to understand why we need more than forgiveness.

Not surprisingly, the main requirement for entering into eternal life is that one actually be alive. Jesus himself said, “No one can see [enter into] the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3 NIV). A key component of New Testament salvation, therefore, is centered on our connection to the very life of God, through Jesus Christ *via* the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is when we become one spiritually with Christ himself that we enter into both forgiveness and life. Just as a husband and wife become one in their physical life, so too Christ and the Christian, through the indwelling of the Spirit, become one in their spiritual life. Through our union with Christ, his life becomes our own. We are born again precisely because we have been united to the one who is life itself.

The ability to live a God-pleasing life, indeed, to inherit eternal life, does not stem from our dedication to God or vows of our will; rather, it flows to us from the power of the divine life granted to us through our supernatural union with Christ. The very life of God through Christ via the Holy Spirit has taken up residence inside us. We are irrevocably wed to the divine nature, and human marriage is a powerful picture, or symbol, of this union.

In the end, our final hope of salvation is that we have been married to Christ. When we come to God for salvation, he makes us one with Christ—just as a man and a woman become one in marriage. This union with Christ is the very thing that provides eternal life.

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Indeed, the eternal life that we have now begun to live is the eternal life that Christ lives. The sap of the vine is the sap of the branch. Through our union with him, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). He has become our head, and as his bride, his job is to present us “to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:27 NIV). And he will do it. Marriage and sex are powerful illustrations of the union that exists between Christ and the Christian, and they were created specifically for that purpose.

THE *WHY* AND THE *HOW* OF SEXUAL PURITY

Now that we understand why God created sex, we can begin to understand the reasons behind his commands regarding sexual purity. Ultimately, God’s commands always relate to his image.

As noted already, we tend to believe that God’s commands are given to us merely for our own sake. But this is not true. As those created in the image of God, our very nature as image bearers explains the reasons behind God’s commands. Not only is sex a divinely appointed image of the gospel, but also man himself is an image of God (Gen. 1:26–27; Rom. 8:29–31; 1 Cor. 11:7; 15:49). We are walking sermon illustrations, if you will. Therefore, since God created us to be images, or types, of himself, revealing his invisible glory to the visible world, it is essential that all we do be aligned with all that God does, for we glorify God by manifesting his goodness through our own goodness. Our glory is his glory, for the glory and goodness we possess is not inherent within us but comes first from him, testifying to his infinite goodness.

Therefore, the ways in which God acts, loves, thinks, and feels all provide the basis for how we are to act, love, think, and feel. We are called to act mercifully because he is merciful (Luke 6:36); we are called to be perfect because he is perfect (Matt. 5:48); we are called to do good to our enemies because he does good to his

(Matt. 5:44–45); and we are called to be holy because he is holy (1 Pet. 1:15–16). Although the Creator’s infinite being and actions cannot be equally and identically reflected in a finite creature, the parallel remains valid. Ultimately, every action to which we are called, every function that he created us to fulfill, relates to God’s actions and nature. This is no less true regarding sex and God’s commands for sexual purity.

God’s major intent in creating sex was that it serve as a living witness of the spiritual oneness between Christ and the church. Knowledge of this higher reality then helps us understand how we should behave within the realm of the earthly reality. In other words, our sex lives should be patterned after the way in which Christ and the church relate spiritually. Viewing sexuality from this framework not only explains how we should act but also why we should act a certain way.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:15–17 the commands that Paul gives regarding sexual activity are based on the “one spirit” relationship between Christ and the church. We must not unite ourselves sexually to a prostitute, Paul argues, because we have become united spiritually to Christ. But the prohibition in this passage is not against sex in general but against sex with a prostitute. Our spiritual oneness with Christ does not prevent us from having sex with our spouse. In fact, Paul commands this in 1 Corinthians 7:5. But why is sex with our spouse legitimate and sex with a prostitute sinful? How is it that our spiritual oneness with Christ does not stand in the way of all sexual relationships?

When talking about the importance of sexual purity, it is tempting to answer questions such as this on a strictly human level. We might list the myriad of sexually transmitted diseases that can be caught. We could list documented adverse psychological effects of promiscuity. We could talk further about the negative effects of sexual licentiousness on one’s future spouse or the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy. But all of these considerations only reinforce

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the idea that sex is all about us, as though God's commands have only to do with what works best for humanity. Even apart from such side effects, promiscuous sex would still be forbidden because none of the consequences, however true, get to the root of why God has forbidden sex with a prostitute. The issue must first be addressed on a divine plane before it can be addressed on a human plane.

As we saw, God's commands relate to the image of the heavenly realities he intends our lives to bear. Sex with a prostitute, then, is forbidden because it breaks the picture of Christ's single-minded connection and devotion to his bride. Just as Christ reserves himself spiritually for his spouse (the church), so too we are called to reserve ourselves sexually for our husband or wife. The way we behave sexually must conform to that which God has created sex to illustrate: the life-changing nature of the gospel. Monogamy and permanency are vital aspects of this image. Christ is united to the church alone; thus a man must be united to his wife alone. Christ does not divorce his bride; we must not divorce our spouse. Do you see the connection? Our sexual activity must align with the way Christ relates spiritually to the church.

Therefore, the man who uses his sexuality in a promiscuous way fails to act consistently with the image of Christ's monogamous wait for his bride. Christ has purposed to become one with the church alone. Accordingly, singles must reserve their sexuality for their future spouses as an expression of Christ's single-minded devotion to his own. God calls us to reserve our sexuality for the marriage relationship, because it is only in marriage that the image of Christ's relationship to the church can be lived out.

It is fundamentally important that we act out our sexuality in a manner consistent with the image that it was created to portray. We will explore the full implications of this in chapters to come, particularly as it relates to establishing an objective definition of sexual purity, but for now, let's recap.⁷

RECAP

We were made to be like God, existing as living portraits of his divine goodness. Every task that God gives us is centered on his own purposes and nature. Human government, marriage, sex, parents, and Christians themselves (to name just a few) all relate to God's purposes and actions, serving as images of higher heavenly realities. God is about glorifying himself, and the way he has chosen to do so in our lives is through our existence in his glorious image. Like an earthly father who is glorified through the glory of his children, so too God is glorified through our glorification (Rom. 8:30). But such glory cannot be achieved apart from our living out the image of God, for only in God himself is true glory found.

This is why our lives are not about us alone. We are not our own. We bear the image of another, and the ownership of that image belongs to him. And since we bear the image of another, we are not free to decide for ourselves what is best for us. We must not act in ways that are inconsistent with the character of the one we portray. It is important that we live every facet of our lives as a correct witness to the image of God. Everything he asks of us is so that we might be conformed to his image. Put another way, the Bible's commands regarding sex are never arbitrary—they are endowed with great purpose.

So, as we study sexual purity, we must remember that every part of us, including our sexuality, has a higher purpose than merely our own pleasure, for every part of us was created primarily to image forth the glory of God. When we learn to view the world as a mirror of God's divine nature and purposes, we are saved from the dead end of self-absorption; life has a higher purpose than our autonomous satisfaction.

We cannot let such an important area of our life be driven by mere pragmatism and anthropocentric arguments. We must always view this issue through a God-centered lens. You are not your own;

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you have been bought with a price and therefore must honor God with your body. He desires your best. He desires your sexual satisfaction more than you ever will, for through the proper expression of your sexuality, both you and the world will have a window through which to see the heart of the gospel. But if we fall prey to the lie that sex is about our happiness alone, we will be robbed of the joy that God intends it to bring. It is only when we live out the image of God that we will find the happiness of God.

Now that we understand the *why* of sexual purity, let's find out what the Bible has to say about the *what*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) What is a *type*? What are some examples of types in the Bible?
- 2) According to Ephesians 5:28–32, how does sex serve as a type, or image, of the gospel?
- 3) What happens when a man and woman come together sexually? How is this like Christ's relationship to the church?
- 4) How does knowing that God created sex to serve as a living image of our spiritual union with Christ help us understand the reason behind God's commands regarding sexual purity?
- 5) What applications can be drawn from the fact that God created sex to serve as a type of Christ and the church, particularly in the realm of sexual satisfaction and sexual purity?

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JOE STOWELL, President, Cornerstone University

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