

What is Sex? Single Christians and Erotic Boundaries*

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As a single guy I freely confess to visiting Internet dating sites. Once when surfing profiles, I came across a very attractive blond from Southern California who claimed to be Christian. In her pictures she sprawled provocatively on an uncovered bed wearing pink panties. She confesses in her profile that she hates to brag, but guys have told her repeatedly that she gives the best “head” they have ever experienced. To be sure, this woman could justify her sexual encounters by claiming she violated no Christian ethic. She is not entirely nude, she is only sucking her finger in the picture, and after all, the Bible nowhere says, “Thou shalt not commit oral sex before marriage.”

The previous generation’s sexual revolution left its demise not only in secular western society but also in the portals of the church. Recent statistics suggest that while extramarital affairs and teen sex are slowly becoming less approved by Americans than they were in the 1970’s, premarital sex is becoming more approved.¹ This is not merely a teen problem, but premarital sex tempts an ever-increasing amount of Christians between the ages of 20 to 40-something or more who find themselves single because of school, career, divorce, widowhood, lack of social skills, bad looks, or just not being fortunate enough to find the right person.² While it is true that remaining a virgin until marriage does seem to lessen the odds of a later divorce,³ most adult singles, some Christians included, do not want to wait until the wedding before having sex. Perhaps it is not astonishing that Catholics, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians as a whole are more open to

Notes

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¹ See the research statistics in Judith Treas, “How Cohorts, Education, and Ideology Shaped a New Sexual Revolution on American Attitudes toward Nonmarital Sex, 1972-1998,” *Sociological Perspectives* 45.3 (2002), 267-83.

² I target younger singles in this study because I currently attend a Christian group ambiguously considered Generation X. As well, younger singles as whole tend to be more promiscuous than older ones. This chapter nevertheless is relevant to anyone who is tempted by non-marital sex.

³ See the study done in Joan R. Kahn, “Premarital Sex and the Risk of Divorce,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53 (1991), 845-855.

the idea of premarital sex than Baptists and Pentecostals.⁴ What turns out more surprising is that there are a growing number of single Evangelicals who had premarital sex. In one study, while the total amount of high school Evangelicals who have premarital sex was less than half the rate of other high school students, about 27% claimed to having sexual intercourse by the age of 17-18, and this rate accelerated to 55-60% for Evangelicals between the ages of 18-24.⁵

More studies need to verify these claims, especially since statistic research does not always give accurate samplings. It may not be an exaggeration, however, to affirm that even though single church-goers engage in premarital sex less than secular singles, a growing number are not virgins.

Contemporary society's tendency to have its singles delay marriage until well into adulthood only agitates sex problems in the church. Today's single Christians experience the difficult paradox of a sex-crazed culture telling them not to get married until their late 20's, 30's, or even 40's, while at the same time their churches expect them to remain celibate all those years. Western culture drives almost everyone to be self-conscious about looking younger, dressing sexier, getting a smaller waist yet larger breasts, or growing bigger muscles and a larger penis. As Stephen Barton perceptively points out about the way western society invests an economic interest in sexual desire, "It is as if the only language we understand is the language of unfulfilled desire, where sexuality is the master symbol and the products of consumer capitalism the means of fulfillment."⁶

Is the Christian's struggle with sex really that bad? Seeing is believing – just visit any number of dating services on the Internet that possess a category related to sexual practice and find the perplexing phenomenon of profilers who claim to be "Christian" in the category of religion and yet "Adventurous" in the category of sex. Join almost any progressive Christian small group and hear the stories about sexual temptations for yourself. The paradox is that many believers – Protestant, Catholic, and even conservative Evangelicals – have all heard that sexual intercourse outside of marriage is wrong, but when the opportunity arises for them to engage in it with an attractive partner,

⁴ See the studies of Scott H. Beck, Bettie S. Cole, and Judith A. Hammond, "Religious Heritage and Premarital Sex: Evidence from a National Sample of Young Adults," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30.2 (1991), 173-180; John K. Cochran, Leonard Beeghly, "The Influence of Religion on Attitudes toward Nonmarital Sexuality: A Preliminary Assessment of Reference Group Theory," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30.1 (1991), 45-62.

⁵ Tom W. Smith, *American Sexual Behavior: Trends, Socio-Demographic Differences, and Risk Behavior* (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, Dec. 1998), 46. See also "1994 Churched Youth Survey," Barna Research Group, cited in Terry Wier (with Mark Carruth), *Holy Sex: God's Purpose and Plan for Our Sexuality* (New Kensington, Penn.: Whitaker House, 1999), 155-57, 172.

⁶ Stephen C. Barton, "'Glorify God in Your Body' (1 Corinthians 6.20): Thinking Theologically about Sexuality" in *Religion and Sexuality* (ed. Michael A. Hayes, Wendy Porter and David Tombs; Studies in Theology and Sexuality 2; Roehampton Institute London Papers 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 370.

many do so. They have an idea that the Bible frowns on sex outside marriage, but this has not stopped many of them from getting laid.

What do the biblical scriptures actually say about sex? When the text refers to sexual misconduct are they referring to adultery, premarital sexual intercourse, certain sexual acts, or something else? Has a believer successfully abstained from “having sex” if he or she stays away from penile-vaginal intercourse but engages in oral sex, anal sex, or mutual masturbation with another partner? More particularly, which sexual activities, if any, would the Bible consider off-limits for Christians in the contemporary western world?

What Kind of Sex is it? Looking at *Porneia* in the Biblical Scriptures (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Corinthians 6-7)

The Bible often uses the word fornication or sexual immorality to describe sexual misconduct. The Greek text uses *porneia*, which is often related to the Hebrew *znh/z^enut*. Bruce Malina defines *porneia* as “unlawful sexual conduct” when prohibited by the oral or written Torah (Law of Moses). He concludes that since there is no law against premarital sex, *porneia* does not refer to this activity.⁷ Joseph Jensen, on the other hand, points out that virginity was so highly valued among the Israelites that non-virginity on a wedding night provided grounds for a woman’s defamation (Deut. 22:13-21; cf. Jud. 9:2; Sir. 42:9-11; Lev. 19:29LXX; 21:7-14LXX).⁸ Kathy Gaca emphasizes that *porneia* in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) is related to religious rebellion and non-endogamous marriages: it refers to “acts of sexual intercourse and reproduction that deviate from the norm of worshipping God alone”; monotheism is required to comprehend the sexual rule.⁹ In actuality early Jewish literature used variations of *porneia* to describe harlotry and adultery (Gen. 38:24LXX; Num. 25:1LXX; Sir. 23:16ff; 41:17; Test. Jos. 3:8; Jos. Ant. 5.7ff), homosexual activities (Jub. 16:5; 20:5; Test. Ben. 9:1; Sib. Or. 3.764), incest (T. Reub. 1:6; T. Jud. 13:6; CD 4:17-20), and marriage to pagans (Jub. 25:1; cf. 30:7ff). Sexual deviance in the Bible finds its origin in the Mosaic sexual holiness codes of Leviticus 18-21 and Deuteronomy 22, where a number of sexual practices such as incest, bestiality, and homoeroticism are considered illegitimate. Sex offenders were to be punished either by God or Israel (Gen. 19; Lev. 20:10; Num. 25; Deut. 22:20-24; Judges 19-20; Job 24:15-24; Prov. 7; Wisd. 3:16-19; cf. John 8:1-11).

Gaca maintains that in the New Testament Paul stresses religious endogamy when he tells Christians they are free to marry but only to someone “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14), and that the apostle Paul views *porneia* “for the most part” as “outside of

⁷ Bruce J. Malina, “Does *Porneia* mean Fornication?” *Novum Testamentum* 14.1 (1972), 17.

⁸ Joseph Jensen, “Does *Porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina,” *Novum Testamentum* 20.3 (1978), 165-66.

⁹ Kathy L. Gaca, *The Making of Fornication: Eros, Ethics, and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 19-20, 124.

the institution of marriage in the Lord.”¹⁰ In this view, a Christian commits *porneia* primarily by marrying someone who is a non-Christian or who leads them away from worshipping the one true God. The New Testament, however, uses *porneia* and its derivatives for a range of sexually illegitimate activities including incest (1 Cor. 5:1-5), cultic prostitution (1 Cor. 6:13, 18 cf. 10:8; Rev. 2:14, 20-21), and extra-marital sex (1 Cor. 7:1-2; Matt. 5:32; 19:9; cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; Heb. 13:4). In John’s gospel, Jesus’ opponents considered him a bastard, born from *porneia*, insinuating that his mother had a sexual relationship out of wedlock (John 8:41). In Hebrews, Esau is labeled as sexual immoral (*pornos*) because he essentially prostituted himself by selling his birthright (Heb. 12:16).¹¹ More typically *porneia* appears as one vice among many others in various lists related to the practices of the pagan Greco-Romans. The Christians are warned not to engage in these sins; to do so jeopardizes their inheritance in the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 6:9-11; 10:5-12; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:3-5; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; Mark 7:21; Matt. 15:19; Rev. 9:21; 21:8; 22:15; Did. 3:3; Barn 19:4).¹² Those who commit *porneia* and other illegitimate sex acts incur God’s judgment that may happen as a consequence of their own sins, the wrath of Satan, divine calamity, or eternal punishment at the end of time (1 Cor. 5:1-5; Rom. 1:24-32; 10:8; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 2:20-23; 21:8).¹³

Thus the early Christian writers of the New Testament, similar to their Jewish contemporaries, identify *porneia* as including various kinds of sexual misbehaviors. Since the earliest Christians originally came from early Judaism, they probably considered the same or similar sex acts as illegitimate. Both presupposed to some extent the Old Testament sexual holiness codes: Leviticus 18 seems to be the assumed backdrop behind the early apostolic decree for Gentile believers to abstain from *porneia* in Acts 15:28-29.¹⁴

The apostle Paul elaborates on *porneia* in 1 Corinthians 6-7 and 1 Thessalonians 4. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 he warns against sexual immorality, which in this context refers to sexual intercourse with non-believers, more specifically, prostitutes. The Corinthian

¹⁰ Gaca, 151.

¹¹ Cf. Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 369. The idea of Esau as a fornicator derives from Jewish traditions that refer to him as a sensual man and denounce his marriage with the two foreign Hittite women (Philo *Virt.* 208-10; Jub. 25:1-8; Gen. Rab. 65-67 cf. Gen. 26:32).

¹² Gaca notes that while the early Christians included *porneia* in their vice lists; the Hellenistic philosophers do not (Gaca, 13-14).

¹³ Gaca suggests too much in maintaining that Paul sentences the death penalty for the man who committed *porneia* in 1 Corinthians 5 (Gaca, 139-140). If Paul commanded a Corinthian militia that executed those who were a threat to his churches, we would expect him to use this power to quickly rid himself of his opponents in Galatians 1-6 and 2 Corinthians 9-13! Paul believes instead that vengeance is the Lord’s: God will punish the wicked (cf. Rom. 12:14-21).

¹⁴ Cf. Richard Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*; San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 383. Here the word seems primarily associated with Gentile banqueting or cultic activities.

believers apparently thought much like their fellow Greek pagans: having sexual intercourse with a prostitute was as natural as eating or drinking (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13a).¹⁵ In the now famous words of the Athenian orator Demosthenes, “The *hetaerae* [prostitutes] we have for our pleasure, the concubines for the daily care of our bodies, and our wives so that we can have legitimate children” (*Against Neaera* 59.122).¹⁶ Paul warns the Corinthians to flee from *porneia* and that the believer who has sex with a prostitute/non-believer sins against his own body (1 Cor. 6:13b, 18; cf. Rom. 1:24).¹⁷ His view of “body” in this context may have a double entendre: it means both the individual body of the believer and the social body of Christ in which all believers are members through God’s spirit. The believer’s body is also considered the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 6:15; 3:16-17; 10:16-17; 12:12-14, 27; cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 5:28-32). *Porneia* therefore defiles not only the believer’s holy temple – which is owned and purchased by Christ’s atoning death and will be raised from the dead in the future – but it also dishonors the entire fellowship of believers who are members of the corporate body of Christ (1 Cor. 6:14-16, 19-20). Paul considers non-believers and prostitutes as members of the fallen world (*cosmos*), a location and age controlled by Satan and passing away (1 Cor. 5:1-5, 13; 7:31; 2 Cor. 4:4). Hence when a believer from the body of Christ becomes “one body” by having sex with a prostitute, this represents on a macro-scale the unthinkable sexual union between Christ and the corrupt world belonging to Satan (1 Cor. 6:15-16).¹⁸ With this understanding Paul warns the Corinthians to “flee *porneia*” (1 Cor. 6:18a).

He begins a new topic in 1 Corinthians 7:1 in response to a letter the Corinthians had sent him earlier: “now concerning the things about which you wrote” (cf. 5:1, 9; 8:1; 12:1). Apparently some believers in the region promoted abstinence from having sex with their wives (1 Cor. 7:1b).¹⁹ Paul responds to this misconceived virtue by telling married couples to satisfy each other sexually in order to avoid *porneia*, which here would mean all extramarital sex with or without prostitutes (1 Cor. 7:1-5).²⁰ He then turns his

¹⁵ The biblical verse is probably a Corinthian slogan rather than Paul’s own belief, as John C. Hurd and many others have affirmed (Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, London: SPCK, 1965:67).

¹⁶ Translation from H. Reisser, “porneuvw,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. Colin Brown; Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library/Zondervan, 1986), 1:498.

¹⁷ His argument resembles the Stoic philosopher Muson, who believed that the man who had sex with a prostitute (*hetaerae*) was sinning against his own person, defiling the god in himself by unclean acts. Cf. Friedrich Hauck and Siegfried Schulz, “povrn̄h, povrno~, porneiva, porneuvw, ejkporneuvw,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:582-83.

¹⁸ Dale Martin’s study graphically elaborates this point in *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 176-78.

¹⁹ This too appears to be another Corinthian slogan rather than Paul’s thought (cf. footnote 13). Paul encourages marital sex (1 Cor. 7:2-5; cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-5).

²⁰ In 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 single Christians do not seem to be in view (they are not addressed until 7:7ff). In 7:1-2 to “touch [*haptô*] a woman” and “have [*echô*] a wife...husband” mean “have sex” with your spouse, not “get married,” which normally requires the verb *lambano* or perhaps *ptaomai*. Gordon Fee cites Gen.

attention to the single/unmarried believers and suggests they remain single, but he permits them to get married if they are burning with sexual desire (1 Cor. 7:7-9, 34, 36-37), no doubt implying that premarital sex would be morally wrong. For Paul, the only legitimate sex is marital sex, and the only options for the early Christians were marriage or celibacy. There was no third alternative to participate in premarital sex. Single believers were expected to remain chaste virgins (1 Cor. 7:7-9, 7:25ff; 7:34; Tit. 2:5 cf. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 Paul exhorts every believer to abstain from *porneia* and to possess his own “vessel” (*skeous*) in holiness and honor; not in the passion of “lust” (*epithumia*); they are not to take advantage of or cheat their brothers (fellow believers) in this regard. If the term “vessel” refers to a wife (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7), this passage is directed at the single men – they are to get married. The verb “acquire/take” (*ptaomai*) finds support in early Jewish texts in relation to *getting* a wife (Ruth 4:10; Sir. 36:24).²¹ But there are several problems with this perspective. First, the same verb also can be translated as “possess/gain mastery over,” and Paul uses *vessel* elsewhere in reference to the body, not a wife (2 Cor. 4:7). Second, Jewish sources affirming the vessel=wife view might not have been readily understood by the Gentile readers of 1 Thessalonians. A third problem is this – Paul does not tip off the readers beforehand that he wishes to address only the single males in the congregation. We might expect him to distinguish between married and singles as he did in 1 Corinthians 7:8-11. Finally if the vessel refers to a wife, this interpretation creates tensions with 1 Corinthians 7:9: “better to marry than to burn with passion.” How does Paul assert the Thessalonians to get married but don’t have passionate sexual desire for their wives (1 Thes. 4:5) when this, in essence, is the *very reason* why he affirms the Corinthian believers should get married?

George Carras has argued rather persuasively that, given the Gentile background of the Thessalonian believers, the vessel is a euphemism for the penis (cf. 1 Sam. 21:4-5 LXX).²² The ubiquitous phallic symbols in the ancient cults of Thessalonica complement the notion that the Thessalonians were quite familiar with such vessels.²³ An alternative possibility is that the word vessel refers to both penis and body in this passage; the penis could be understood as a synecdoche for the entire body. Perhaps Paul deliberately chooses the ambiguous term vessel intending to be more inclusive, having both the body

20:6LXX; Ruth 2:9LXX; Plato *Leg.* 8.840a; Jos. *Ant.* 1.163 as examples of sex using *haptô* and Exod. 2:1LXX; Deut. 28:30LXX; Isa. 13:16LXX; Mark 6:18; John 4:18 as examples of monogamous sex using *echô*. He cites Test. Lev. 9:9-10 and Tobit 4:12 for *lambano* in relation to getting married (Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987:275-79).

²¹ For more examples, see O. Larry Yarbrough, *Not Like the Gentiles: Marriage Rules in the Letters of Paul* (SBL Dissertation Series 80; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 65-87.

²² George P. Carras, “Jewish Ethics and Gentile Converts: Remarks on 1 Thes 4,3-8,” in *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium; Ed. Raymond F. Collins; Uitgeverij Peeters Leuven: Leuvan University Press, 1990), 306-315.

²³ Cf. Karl Donfried, “The Cults of Thessalonica and The Thessalonian Correspondence,” *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), 336-56.

and penis in view.²⁴ In any case, the word applies to everyone, or at least every male who has a penis, whether married or single. Paul also wants the women to be sexually pure (1 Cor. 7:34ff; Rom 1:24-27), but in this particular context the message seems directed primarily to men. It is the will of God that every male, married or single, holds his penis in “holiness and honor” by refraining from *porneia*. The believer’s sexual practices should not resemble those of the Gentiles who “do not know God” (1 Thes. 4:3-5).

What does Paul mean, then, by exhorting the Thessalonians not to transgress or take advantage of their brothers in this matter (1 Thes. 4:6)?²⁵ If the person wronged is a “brother,” Paul means a fellow believer, which is the way he normally addresses Christians throughout the letter (1 Thes. 4:1, 9, 13 cf. 1:4; 2:1, 9, 17; 5:1, 12, 25-26). Here *porneia* does not focus on believer having sex with prostitutes or non-believers, as was the case in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, but believer fornicating with fellow believer! This perspective makes sense bearing in mind the Thessalonian situation. The Christians in that area became idle and did not work due to their belief that the second coming of Christ would take place any minute (1 Thes. 4:11-18; 2 Thes. 2:1-3; 3:6-11). Outsiders persecuted them as well (1 Thes. 1:6-7; 2:13-16; 2 Thes. 1:6 cf. Acts 17:5-10). Given these circumstances, some unemployed Gentile Christians probably entertained themselves by having sex with other congregation members; it may have relieved their boredom. Their promiscuity arose from *within* the congregation rather than with non-believers outside of it.

Since 1 Thessalonians 4:6 is related to a male transgressing and taking advantage of another male, it has been argued that Paul is forbidding homoerotic relationships in the congregation.²⁶ Elsewhere he warns the believers against homosexual activities and considers them as a vice practiced by unconverted Gentiles (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Rom. 1:24-27; cf. 1 Tim. 1:10).²⁷ If so, the meaning in 1 Thessalonians 4:6 still seems more inclusive

²⁴ This is not the only time he would give polyvalent meaning to a word: the “*spiritual rock* ... was Christ” in 1 Corinthians 10:3-4 appears to have metaphorical, historical, and rhetorical meanings (cf. B. J. Oropeza, *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance, and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation*; WUNT 2.115; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000: 104-113). Could Paul have in mind the penis, body *and* wife by the term vessel? While this is possible, the tension between 1 Thes. 4:5 and 1 Cor. 7:9 needs some resolution.

²⁵ The “matter” (*pragma*) refers to the sexual issue under discussion in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. Since sexual uncleanness is mentioned in 4:7, the subject remains the same in 4:6; Paul does take up a new subject related to business dealings in 4:6. See Charles A. Wanamaker for a compelling critique of the business dealings interpretation (*The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*; NIGTC; Charlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990: 154-55).

²⁶ Cf. O. L. Yarbrough, 75-76.

²⁷ Arguments that reduce Paul’s homoerotic passages to pederasty, male prostitution, or mere cultic idolatrous activities are not convincing. Looking at passages related to homosexuality in the Bible, Carol Smith’s perceptive article shows that “the method of biblical interpretation that someone chooses usually reflects the prior agenda of the interpreter” (Smith, “It’s in the Book’: Using the Bible in Discussions of Human Sexuality,” In *Religion and Sexuality*; Studies in Theology and Sexuality 2; Ed. M. A. Hayes, W. Porter, D. Tombs. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998:126). Paul’s Gentile readers would not have made clear distinctions between valid and invalid homoerotic practices based on Paul’s writings. As was the case with most Jews of his day, Paul most likely considered all homosexual activity as sin, especially if

than just Christians practicing homoerotic sex. In the patriarchal Greco-Roman world of Paul, if a man's wife had sexual relationships with another person this act was seen as wronging the man of his property and rightful possession (e.g., Exod. 20:14-15).²⁸ While adultery definitely fits the idea of stealing someone else's property (in this case a believing neighbor's wife), Paul's intention is still broader. If the man who was wronged was the head of his household, his household included wife, concubines, daughters, sons, female and male slaves, and possibly sisters and brothers (Col. 3:18-4:1; Eph. 5:22-6:9; cf. 1 Cor. 7:36-38). His property was violated if the offender had sex with any one of the members of his household. If a daughter lost her virginity outside of marriage, both her father and her future husband would be violated of their rightful possession; the deflowered woman loses her value; she was no longer a new commodity, but a used and damaged product (cf. Pliny *Ep.* 1.14; Philo *Spec. Leg.* 3.79-82; Deut. 22:13-21).²⁹ Paul is arguing that when a believer has sex with anyone from another believer's household, this is transgression and *porneia*.

Paul's outlook on *porneia* is thus very similar to other Jews of his time. He considered premarital sex to be illegitimate sex. He calls believers to abstain from all extramarital sex if married and all premarital sex if single, regardless of whether the person they had sex with was a believer or not. Jennifer Glancy is not far from the mark by relating Paul's definition of *porneia* to prostitution narrowly, and "sexual irregularity" more broadly;

he uses the sex codes of the Septuagint version of Leviticus 18-20 as the backdrop behind these passages. For instance, the wording in Lev. 18:22LXX (male having sex with male) seems to be the best explanation for how Paul derives the term *arsenokoitai* in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 1 Tim. 1:10. And if he condemned a monogamous incestuous relationship in 1 Corinthians 5, which he based on the same sex code of Leviticus 18-20, we must seriously consider why he would not have done the same thing had the problem been a monogamous homosexual relationship. This tends to point us in the direction of admitting Paul's negative stand against homosexuality and asking instead questions related to whether or not Paul was right for holding the view he did. I think such an approach would be more fruitful for the homosexual debate than trying to get Paul to not say something he almost surely does. For some updated discussions related to the biblical passages on homosexuality, see Gaca, 2003:124-26; Dan O. Via and Robert A. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Text and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); Richard B. Hays, *Moral Vision*, 379-406; Raymond F. Collins, *Sexual Ethics and the New Testament: Behavior and Belief* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 86-99, 128-46; William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

²⁸ Cf. L. William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed & Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 109, 147-67, 175-81, 190-220; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 159-160. F. F. Bruce notes that the word *pleonektein* ("take advantage of") in this verse suggests the idea of "greed for property." Pauline sources occasionally combine the word with *porneia* or impurity elsewhere (1 Cor. 5:10-11; Eph. 4:19; 5:3-5). Although Bruce thinks the brother was wronged because his wife was violated (adultery), he also rightly suggests that the violated person could be "another member of the brother's household" (Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*; Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1982:84).

²⁹ Also, in classic Roman history the father had *patria potestas* or absolute control over his family members (cf. J. A. Crook, "Patria Potestas," *Classical Quarterly* 17; 1967:113-122). Countryman recognizes that the daughter was her father's property and could be devalued if she lost her virginity, but he overlooks this implication in 1 Thessalonians 4:6 (Countryman, 158 cf. 105).

this includes all “sexual activity outside of marriage,” since marriage and celibacy were the only legitimate options.³⁰ Yet fornication, if understood only as non-marital sex, would not be broad enough to define *porneia* because the Greek word also refers to a monogamous or marital sexual relationship that is illegitimate, such as when Paul condemns a Corinthian Christian for committing incest with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1-5). *Porneia* in marriage may also relate to incest in Tobit when Tobias takes Sarah to wife according to Levirate customs and not for *porneia* (Tob. 8:7). Tobias’s pious attitude here probably stems from a Jewish tradition that taking a relative’s widow for sexual license instead of procreation is like committing incest (cf. b. Yeb. 39b; Gen. 38:8-9).³¹ Consequently illegitimate sexual activity or sexual immorality captures *porneia*’s meaning better, but these terms are rather vague. The precise nuance of *porneia* depends more on the context in which it appears than one clear, concise, standard definition. For our purposes we have demonstrated that the New Testament considers all sexual intercourse outside of marriage as *porneia* and vice; this includes premarital sex.

Impurity/ uncleanness (*akartharsia*) is another term related to *porneia* (1 Thes. 4:7), which sometimes refers to sexual excess seen as the nemesis of holiness and practiced by the unregenerate Gentiles (1 Thes. 4:3,4,7,8; Rom. 1:24ff). Believers are delivered from this sin through the process of sanctification after they convert to Christ (Rom. 6:19-23; Eph. 4:17-23). Paul adds this word to his vice lists and sometimes couples it with *porneia* or other terms of sexual deviance (Gal. 5:19f; 2 Cor. 12:21f; Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:3-5). Another word for erotic misconduct in the New Testament is *aselgia*, which is translated as licentiousness, lasciviousness, debauchery, wantonness, or sexual excess. It too is found in a number of vice lists (2 Cor. 12:21f; Rom. 13:13-14; Eph. 4:19; 5:3-5; 1 Pet. 4:3f; cf. Heras Sim. 9.15:3; Herm. Vis. 3.7.2; T. Jud. 23:1; Wisd. 14:26). In classic Greek it basically denoted excess in pleasure or passion and a lack of self-control.³² Lot was distressed by the licentiousness of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet. 2:7ff; Jude 4, 7 cf. Gen. 19), and Balaam instigated the Moabite women to lead Israelite men astray through this vice (Philo, *De Vit. Mos.* 1.305; cf. Num. 25). If *aselgia* is related to a lack of sexual self-control in Galatians 5:19, it would appear to be the opposite of the virtue of the Spirit related to self-control in Galatians 5:22.

³⁰ Jennifer A. Glancy, “Obstacles to Slaves’ Participation in the Corinthian Church,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998), 493, 497, 501. Her work addresses the perplexing silence of the New Testament on the issue of slaves who were not at liberty to say no to their masters’ lustful desire to have sex with them. Perhaps this situation functions more as rape than *porneia*. It does not fit the category of willful sexual activities, which is normally what is assumed by marital and premarital sex. The slave is not guilty of sexual immorality if she cannot say no to her master. It is not known, however, what Paul would have thought. Jensen suggests that unless this relevant issue was entirely ignored, the early Christians must have understood that Christian masters were not to have sex with their own slaves; they would consider such an act as *porneia* (Jensen, 183-84).

³¹ The same tradition also mentions an alternative Jewish tradition was to take her “whatever” the motive (cf. Tosef. Yeb. 6; cf. b. Yeb. 39b).

³² Holt N. Parker, “Love’s Body Anatomized: The Ancient Erotic Handbooks and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,” in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (Ed. Amy Richlin; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 98.

New Testament terms such as impurity and licentiousness seem very broad and vague; they may at times appear almost synonymous with *porneia* and yet when coupled with *porneia* in the same vice lists they are different in meaning. The early Christian writers, Paul in particular, may have added the combination of sexually illegitimate words to the same vice lists to *emphasize* a point: non-marital sexual acts, and their various nuances that are practiced among the non-believers, were off-limits for Christians. It is almost as though Paul anticipated several terms for sexual vice just in case a counter claim was made by Christian Gentile readers who might consider their sexual deviance to be an exception to the rule.

Oral Sex and Other Erotic Delights: Is It Abstinence or Premarital Sex?

Problems surrounding the question on whether oral sex is “having sex” received public attention after former President Bill Clinton claimed he did not have sex with Monica Lewinsky. When it was discovered that the couple engaged in oral-genital sex, media coverage prompted a *Newsweek* article to give advice to parents on how to discuss oral sex with their pre-adolescent children, just in case they asked.³³ Parents, teachers, and social workers discourage teenagers from premarital sex due to sexual transmitted diseases and teen pregnancies, but they frequently overlook the problem of defining exactly what premarital sex is. A gathering of recent statistics put forward the revelation that many teens begin experimenting with oral sex in junior high school, and about half or more high school students have either performed fellatio (oral-penile sex) or cunnilingus (oral-vaginal sex).³⁴ The percentage of young single adults who practice oral sex is even higher than this.³⁵ Many singles, especially young females, see oral sex as a win-win situation: they can sexually satisfy their boyfriends, remain virgins, and not have to worry about getting pregnant. They also hold to a misconception that oral sex does not transmit sexual diseases. One study shows that adult males seek out fellatio with prostitutes more than any other type of sex, and this is not necessarily related to its unavailability with more conventional partners.³⁶ Among heterosexual singles, oral sex is practiced far more frequently than anal sex, and studies have uncovered that young adults

³³ Barbara Kantrowitz, “The Home Front: Mom, What’s Oral Sex?” *Newsweek* 132.12 (1998), 44.

³⁴ Lisa Remez, “Oral Sex Among Adolescents: Is It Sex or Is It Abstinence?” *Family Planning Perspectives* 32.6 (2000), 298-304; Mitchell J. Prinstein, Christina S. Meade, Geoffrey L. Cohen, “Adolescent Oral Sex, Peer Popularity, and Perceptions of Best Friends’ Sexual Behavior,” *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 28.4 (2003), 243-49.

³⁵ Cf. Stephanie A. Sanders, June M. Reinisch, “Would you Say You ‘Had Sex’ If...” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 281.3 (1999), 275-77; Malissa A. Bailey, “College Students’ Perceptions of and Intentions to Engage in Sexually Abstinent versus Not Abstinent Behaviors,” Master of Science Thesis; North Carolina State University, 1998.

³⁶ Martin A. Monto, “Prostitution and Fellatio,” *Journal of Sex Research* 38.2 (2001), 140-45.

normally consider anal sex to be having “sex,” while they do not consider oral sex to be having “sex.”³⁷ Differently an Internet survey revealed that a greater number homosexuals and bisexuals label activities such as oral and anal sex to be “sex.”³⁸ The Heterosexual singles are the ones who hold the double standard between oral and anal sex, and they happen to practice oral sex far more frequently than anal.

If single Christians are to refrain from sexual intercourse outside marriage, would the same abstinence apply to anal and oral sex? Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 seems applicable. Abstinence from *porneia* in this passage relates to sex with prostitutes, but this does not necessarily mean penile-vaginal sex. In the world of the ancient Corinthians, sex with prostitutes involved a diversity of sexual pleasures. Graffiti from the ruins of Pompeii, ancient pornographic art, and related evidence from Greco-Roman sources serve as explicit reminders of the sexual variety available to first century clients.³⁹ It would be naïve for us to think that these prostitutes did not perform fellatio as one of their many specialties. What makes this topic relevant for our discussion is that Paul does not address sex with prostitutes as wrong because it exploited women, children, or the less privileged classes; as we examined earlier, it was wrong because it involved *a union* between two dissimilar bodies. No doubt Paul has sexual penetration in mind by this union.⁴⁰ Sexual penetration makes two bodies become one through sex, and it occurs at least three ways, all of which have been practiced by prostitutes with their clients for ages: penile-vaginal sex, oral sex, and anal sex.⁴¹ We also noted earlier that his definition of *porneia* probably includes male Christian homoerotic activities (1 Thes. 4:6). Hence, Paul’s use of *porneia* does not necessarily assume penile-vaginal sex as the only physical means of penetration by which this vice is accomplished. The upshot of this is that the New Testament considers *porneia* off-limits for Christians, and penile-vaginal, penile-

³⁷ In one study 60% of the college students surveyed did not believe oral sex was “sex,” while only 20% did not believe anal sex with “sex” (Laura M. Bogart, Heather Cecil, David A. Wagstaff, Steven D. Pinkerton, Paul R. Abramson, “Is It ‘Sex’? College Students’ Interpretations of Sexual Behavior Terminology,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 37.2; 2000: 108-116). Similar results are found in Remez (301) and Bailey (2-7, 36-40).

³⁸ Remez, 301.

³⁹ Cf. Ove Brusendorff and Poul Henningsen, *A History of Eroticism* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1963); Amy Richlin, ed. *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Albert Bell, *A Guide to the New Testament World* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1994), 235; Antonio Varona, *Eroticism in Pompeii* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001); Judith P. Hallett, Marilyn B. Skinner, eds. *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); John R. Clarke, *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art, 100 B.C. – A.D. 250* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Cf. D. Martin, 177-78.

⁴¹ To what extent would Paul have known about these various types sexual penetrations? Did he ever visit a brothel or read/heard the testimonies of others who did? If he was indeed a learned man, frequent traveler, and missionary to pagan Gentiles, the latter would at least seem likely. As well, sexually explicit talk and graphic imagery related to prostitution was not void in ancient Jewish traditions (e.g., Ezek. 16:22, 27, 36, 46ff, 23:8, 19-21, 29; cf. Rev. 17:4, 16; Prov. 30:20).

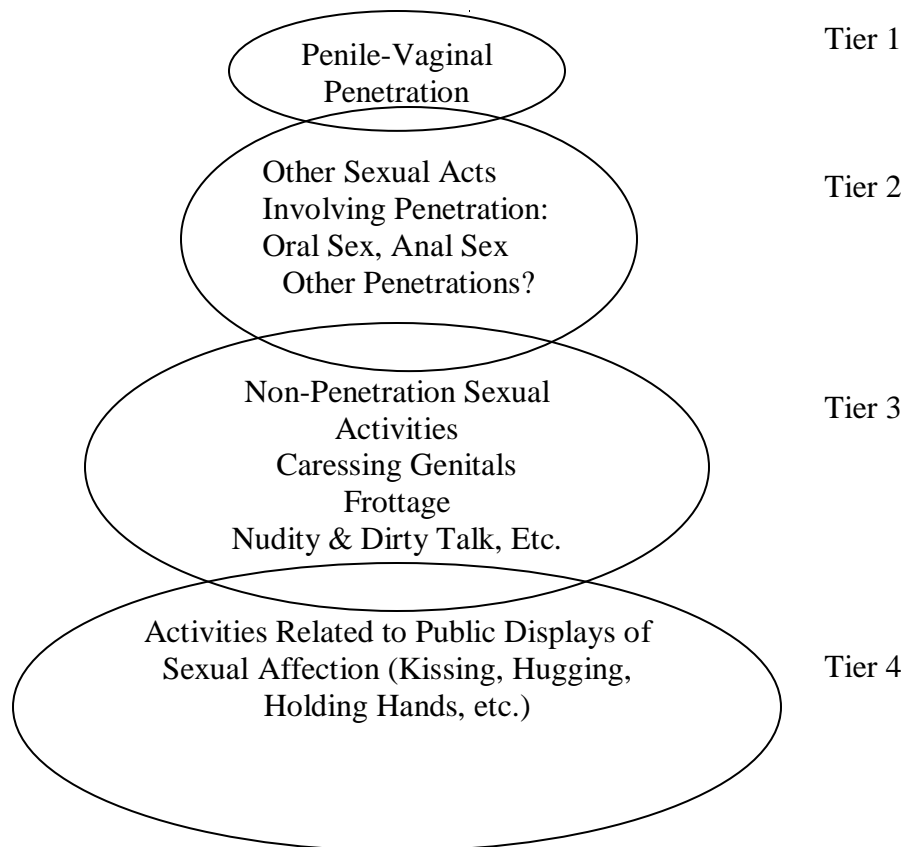
oral, and penile-anal forms of penetration are instrumental ways in which *porneia* happens.

We also do well to suspect that other sexual vices such as licentiousness (*aselgia*), impurity (*akatharsia*), lust (*epithumia*), and related words would include some premarital sexual activities besides coitus. The multiplication of sex words in the biblical vice lists seem to be added in order to amplify the forbiddance of sexual deviance and many of its anticipated nuances. One example of this is the warning against sexually vulgar language and joking associated with *porneia* in Ephesians 5:3-5 (cf. 4:29).⁴² Today's phone sex and "sexy dirty talking" would seem to fit well with this description. Another example: the sex vices mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21 (*porneia*, *aselgia*, and *akatharsia*) cannot predict the entire extent of wrongful sex, and so Paul adds the phrase, "and things such as these," anticipating other sexual deviances and "works of flesh" he might have missed in this list! A more thorough examination of this issue, however, is beyond the scope of this study. One thing is clear: the burden of proof rests on those who would deny that sexual vice in biblical scripture implies not only coitus but acts such as oral sex, anal sex and similar things if done outside the setting of marriage. *Porneia* involves sexual penetration, and vices such as impurity and lust overreach to sexual deviances beyond penetration.

If vices related to extramarital or premarital sex include other activities besides sexual intercourse, this raises new questions. How far is too far in a relationship between non-married heterosexuals? Where do single Christians draw the line? If we define extramarital and premarital "sex" as *sexual penetration*, this may include oral sex, but it does not clarify non-penetrating sexual activities.

The four tiers I have developed below might be useful in clarifying some grey areas:

⁴² Cf. Raymond Collins, 151.



Tier one involves penile-vaginal copulation. Normally speaking, this is the only sexual act that can cause pregnancy. Tier two relates other forms of sexual penetration. This includes oral and anal sex. Along with tier one, these acts can transmit disease, are considered rape if forced upon another person, comprise the vast majority of images found in hard core pornography, and can lead to sex addictions. More fuzzy an issue is whether heavy petting (or mutual masturbation) and the use of sex toys fits best in this tier or number three. Fingers and other objects provide a form of penetration. There are also variations of oral sex involving things such as kissing, licking, and blowing in which a question of penetration remains uncertain.

Tier three includes non-penetrating sexual acts such as non-penetrative caressing of genitals (light petting), frottage (rubbing against each other until orgasm), or other activities in which the genitals get touched or caressed. It generally includes acts that have much less a potential to cause STD than the previous tiers and are often defined as sexual foreplay rather than sexual intercourse. Some of these acts nonetheless lead to orgasm. Like tiers one and two, they are normally done in private (unless on the Internet or silver screen) because they would not be considered appropriate for public behavior. Exception must be made, however, in relation to sexual communications such as dirty talking and sex jokes; they are often shared between more intimate social circles. Ambiguous practices in this category include sexual nudity and exposure of genitals (such as masturbating in front of a partner). These particular activities, outside of a

marriage, do not appear to escape the notion of sexual lust if their goal is to deliberately tempt or arouse someone sexually.

Tier four involves other activities that might be considered sexually affectionate but normally can be done in public. This would include everything from holding hands and foot massages to long embraces with deep French kissing. Activities in this tier may or may not lead to sexual arousal. In terms of marital faithfulness, spouses commit adultery if they engage in tiers one or two with someone other than their spouse. Tier three would seem to constitute “marital unfaithfulness.” Tier four is more questionable. Many forms of affection in western culture, such as a seeing a spouse kissed by another person, may or may not be offensive. Context, motive, and circumstance become important in such cases.

The tiers are useful for clarifying degrees of sex and arousal, but they cannot anticipate and accurately categorize every sexual activity. One unusually vague subject is sexual innuendo (e.g., sucking on a banana or finger), which may be done for purposes of sexual arousal but is publicly acceptable in western culture. Suggestive sexual gestures and language probably fit somewhere within tiers three or four but not in every case: much depends on the intent and level of clarity of the gesture or language. Another area of ambiguity is related to visual lust. It is not clear when sexy dressing turns into lust or partial nudity. Although lusting after a naked body for illegitimate sexual purposes violates biblical precepts (e.g., Matt. 5:28 and see the section below), we do not know what constitutes the boundary between right and wrongful looking in less obvious cases. Does perusing a magazine inundated with beautiful men or women skimpily clad in sexy lingerie or swimwear entice a person to lust? What about watching a movie that has sex and nudity or admiring Boticelli’s nude painting, *The Birth of Venus*? Does looking under a woman’s miniskirt as she walks up a flight of stairs constitute lust? The proper boundary line and level of objectification in every case is different. These and similar examples may or may not lead to arousal, voyeurism, pornography, rape; much depends on the eye of the beholder. Clear boundaries on visual lust that are universally applicable are difficult to draw because everybody’s intention and level of enticement is different. In such cases 1 Corinthians 6:13 and Philippians 4:8 are helpful instruction.

All the same we can arrive at some general conclusions when comparing the sex tiers with our study of the scriptures. Outside of marriage tier one would definitely fall under the category of *porneia*, and since penetration is both an issue with tiers one and two, non-marital oral and anal sex would seem to be included under this definition. It is at tier three or with the heavy petting at tier two that the subject of abstinence and non-abstinence becomes blurry. However, other New Testament words for sexual illegitimacy such as lust, licentiousness, sexual uncleanness, and vulgar language may be applicable for this tier even if the biblical writers did not have the exact practices I have listed in mind. Certain sex acts may not be defined as *porneia* but are still considered vices that bring people into conflict with biblical scripture, and these activities might harm the believers and/or their partners. A conclusion about the first three tiers can be established even with fuzzy parameters at the edges of each: *the New Testament would seem to consider non-marital penile-vaginal sexual acts between two (or more) persons as vice.*

Moreover, it is hard to imagine that *porneia* would not seem to include acts that are accomplished through penile-anal sex, oral sex, or possibly other sexual activities also.

What level of biblical permission is allowed in the lower tiers? My own opinion is that most if not all activities under tier three seem to be contrary to biblical values. If someone wishes to contest this, perhaps a more practical answer will do: asking a non-married couple to successfully stop at tier three and go no further is like asking a levee filled beyond its capacity not to break. Sooner or later human nature will relentlessly drive the couple from tier three to a deeper sexual intimacy until orgasm vis-à-vis penetration is reached. Still there is the question about tier four. Here the biblical texts may enlighten by virtue of principle: “All things are permissible to me but no all things are beneficial; all things are permissible but I will not be enslaved by anything” (1 Cor. 6:13; cf. 10:23). In relation to sex Paul advises the Corinthians that some things do not benefit the body of believers and some sexual activities enslave the practitioners.

Paul also warns that a Christian could cause a weaker Christian to fall into sin by virtue of the stronger believer’s freedom to engage in eating things that would cause the weaker to stumble (Rom. 14:19-23; 1 Cor. 8:7-13). Perhaps the same principle can apply for single relationships. Even if we could handle some activities in tiers three or four without falling into tiers two and one, we must always be sensitive to the possibility that our dating partners may not be as sexually self-controlled. A woman may feel fine about deep French kissing while such affection may be her date’s stumbling block. A guy may feel it is okay to caress his date’s breasts, but this may be her sexual weak point. It may take months or only minutes, but what starts off as fairly innocent can very easily turn into to full-blown sex! Here communication, honest self-evaluation, and advice from an intelligent counselor or minister will help the dating couple determine which boundaries are mutually best for them. While individual Christians will draw their boundary lines differently, they should be more concerned about the benefit of the other person than themselves. This is in fact a variation of the greatest commandment to love your neighbor as yourself and do to others what you would want them to do to you (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14; Matt. 7:12; 22:36-40). Love involves wanting what is best for our lover, and what is biblically best is to stay sexually pure (1 Cor. 7). Nevertheless looking at sexual activities in terms of what the single believer can or cannot do misses the point. Paul is clear: sexual purity should not turn into legalism. His suggestions are for the purpose of encouraging single Christians to serve God with unrestrained and undivided allegiance (1 Cor. 7:35). All things should be done to the glory of God, including acts of affection (cf. 1 Cor. 10:24, 31; Col. 3:17; Phil. 2:4).

Sex Alone? Masturbation and Lust

One puzzling sexual topic for Christians is whether private masturbation is a sexual vice or virtue.⁴³ While certain Christian traditions discourage masturbation, there is nothing in

⁴³ For a generally negative conclusion, see John S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 2003), 114-116; for a generally positive conclusion, see Steve Gerali, *The Struggle* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003).

the biblical records that speak for or against it. The Mosaic Law affirms that after a seminal emission, a bath is required for cleansing the discharge. This precept might include masturbation, but it is more accurately targeting all seminal release, including nocturnal emissions and regular sexual intercourse (Lev. 15:16-18). Such a discharge probably would not be considered immoral any more than would skin diseases/leprosy or a woman's menstruation, even though these things were also considered ritually unclean (Lev. 14; 15:19-24). The Genesis story about Onan spilling his semen on the ground is not related to masturbation but refusing to carry on the blood lineage of his deceased brother. According to the ancient Hebrew custom of Levirate law, a surviving brother was to marry the dead brother's wife and produce offspring for that brother (Gen. 38:6-10; Deut. 25:5-10). While Mark 9:22-28 speaks hyperbolically about cutting off one's limbs in order to escape eternal judgment, it would be reading too much into this passage to claim that Jesus included masturbation as an activity worthy of cutting off one's hand.⁴⁴

A more pointed concern relates masturbation to lust or covetousness (*epithumia*) because many who masturbate use some form of visual arousal while masturbating. It has been argued that when people stimulate themselves, they fantasize about a person from the opposite sex; often a popular celebrity or someone they know personally. Others look at pornography while they masturbate, and others become compulsive sex addicts.⁴⁵ Lust is seen as the chief of vices in some Jewish literature (T. Jud. 16:1; 4 Macc. 2:2-6; cf. 2 Pet. 2:10) and a violation of one of the ten commandments (Exod. 20:17LXX; Deut 5:21LXX; Rom. 7:7; 13:9).⁴⁶ The concept of lust was related to the sexual sin of the angelic Watchers who, according to Jewish tradition, desired the women of earth and committed fornication with them (e.g., 1 En. 10:1-11; cf. Gen. 6:1-2). Paul himself may have struggled with sexual lust (Rom. 7:7-25).⁴⁷ Simon Blackburn defines lust broadly:

⁴⁴ Raymond Collins attempts to interpret Mark 9:42-48 with the Talmud's denouncement of masturbation (67-68). The connection is not convincing. If Jesus were speaking against masturbation, we might expect something reminiscent to what is found in the Hebrew Scriptures or the literature of Second Temple Judaism, which is more contemporary with Mark's gospel. Collins does not even qualify masturbation when he claims it a vice that excludes a person from inheriting God's kingdom (189). If it were this wicked, we should expect to find it more clearly condemned *somewhere* in the Scriptures.

⁴⁵ The growing epidemic of porn addicts who view the Internet is one testimony to sexual addiction. Recent studies show that more than 20 million Internet users visit sex sites regularly, and more than 200,000 people are now plagued by the relatively new disorder of cybersex addiction (cf. Al Cooper, ed. *Cybersex: The Dark Side of the Force*; A Special Issue of the Journal *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*; Philadelphia: Bruner-Routledge, 2000:25).

⁴⁶ Sometimes *pleonexia* takes on a similar meaning that relates to sexual lust (Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5).

⁴⁷ Robert Gundry relates Romans 7 to Paul's pre-Christian *bar mitzvah*, which is one possible way of reading the "I" in Romans 7:7-25 ("The Moral Frustration of Paul Before His Conversion: Sexual Lust in Romans 7:7-25," in *Pauline Studies*; Festschrift for F. F. Bruce; D. A. Hagner and M. Harris, eds.; Exeter, Devon: Paternoster Press, 1980:228-245). Whether Paul's lust came before or after his conversion (or both) does not nullify that he struggled in Romans 7:7, unless the "I" here is purely rhetorical or representative of Adam. In either case Paul would have to completely *exclude* himself from the "I" if we wish to say that he did not personally struggle with *epithumia*.

“the desire that infuses the body, for sexual activity and its pleasure for their own sake.”⁴⁸ A New Testament definition would probably come closer to Gaca’s view: when lust is associated with sin, it is desiring something against God.⁴⁹ Jesus warns that lusting after a woman in one’s heart parallels committing adultery with her (Matthew 5:28; cf. Job 31:1, 9; 1QS 1.6). Not all desire is negative, but sexually desiring a person when either the viewer or the object is married would seem to fit the description in Matthew 5:28. And if having non-marital sex with someone is wrong (regardless of whether they are married or single), then fantasizing about having sex with that person would still seem to fit the warning in this passage. A vivid example of illegitimate lust is found in 2 Samuel [2Kings] 11-12 when David first saw Bathsheba bathing (presumably nude) before committing adultery with her.

Hence, some argue that masturbation is a stepping stone to vices such as pornography and voyeurism. Granted, porn exploits and dehumanizes women and children, making them objects of lust whether they pose in a nude centerfold, dance naked, or perform sex acts on a digital screen.⁵⁰ Porn and voyeurism make humans whom God loves impersonal and objectified, and this runs contrary to the idea of loving one’s neighbor as oneself and regarding every individual as having dignity and being specially made in God’s image (Matt. 22:37-40; Gen. 1:26-27).⁵¹

The major problem when associating visual lust with masturbation is that not every masturbator needs or uses porn, voyeurism, or sexual fantasy when masturbating. A case could be made that masturbation can actually be healthy, having physiological and psychological benefits if not done compulsively. In this light, masturbation would be more a virtue than a vice.⁵² Moreover, masturbation is certainly a more acceptable alternative than engaging in illegitimate sex, whether porn, prostitution, premarital, or extramarital sex. A man on a business trip, for instance, might be better off masturbating than having sex with a hooker or viewing Internet porn if he knows he is prone to do these things when left alone. While it is true that some believers can at least temporarily overcome masturbation through prayer and fasting, Christian youth workers will testify

⁴⁸ Simon Blackburn, *Lust: The Seven Deadly Sins* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19.

⁴⁹ Cf. Gaca, 155-57.

⁵⁰ Some also argue rather persuasively that pornography has an indirect connection with sexual aggression and sex crimes such as rape (cf. Donna Rice Hughes and John D. McMickle, “Pornography Incites Violent Sexual Crime,” in *Pornography: Opposing Viewpoints* (Ed. Carol Wekesser; San Deigo: Greenhaven Press, 1997), 36-39. Judith K. Balswick and Jack O. Balswick write: “viewing pornography may not *cause* sexual aggression toward women, but it is a significant factor in attitudes of sexual aggression and behavior” (*Authentic Human Sexuality: An Integrated Christian Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999: 241).

⁵¹ Some enlightening articles on pornography include Read Mercer Schuchardt, “Hugh Hefner’s Hollow Victory,” *Christianity Today* (Dec. 2003), 50-54; Rosaline Bush, “Pornography Harms Society,” in *Pornography: Opposing Viewpoints* (Ed. Carol Wekesser, San Deigo: Greenhaven Press, 1997), 17-27.

⁵² William E. Phipps, “Masturbation: Vice or Virtue?” *Journal of Religion and Health* 16 (July 1977), 183-95; Gerali, 84-85.

that a number of well-meaning believers, especially male teenagers and young adults, pray and cry that God would take away their desire to masturbate only to find themselves doing it again. Maybe God considers it more important to develop a healthy human sex drive than nullify every Christian's desire to masturbate.⁵³ Ultimately, masturbation seems to be an issue of *adiaphora*, a non-essential matter of the faith that is neither forbidden nor commanded in the Christian scriptures. Similar to drinking alcoholic beverages, it could lead to vice and addiction or remain clear of such things depending on the individual, his/her reason for doing it, and the manner in which he/she does it. Paradoxically masturbation is both a pleasurable and lonely experience, functioning as the ape of marital sex.

Glorify God in your Bodies: A Sexual Ethic for Christians

Although this study helps clarify sexual boundaries, a person wanting to change in sexual behavior needs something more than simply being told what not to do. In fact this approach may even tempt some to experiment with forbidden fruits or dabble and stretch abstinent forbidden zones, seeking to get away with as much pleasure as possible. For married couples, pleasurable and frequent sex works as a preventative against sexual temptation. For some believers seclusion from society or a vow to lifelong celibacy or both have been solutions. Many single Christians, however, only desire temporary celibacy until marriage. If we derive an ethic for sexual purity based on 1 Corinthians 6-7, it will involve the concept of embodiment. When Paul warns the Corinthians congregation against *porneia*, he commands: "glorify God in your bodies" (1 Cor. 6:20; cf. 7:34). To the hyper-spiritual Corinthians, the physical body seemed to be a thing of indifference (1 Cor. 6:13-14; 7:1b; 15:12), but Paul makes it the ground for a constructive sexual imperative. For Paul the body (*soma*) is not the same thing as the flesh (*sarx*). Although the definitions may overlap on occasion, there are important distinctions: It is the body rather than the flesh that is redeemable and will be unified again with the created order God intended. Paul anticipates an incorruptible body made alive and empowered by God's spirit in the resurrection (1 Cor. 6:13b-14; 1 Cor. 15:12-57). The same is not true about the flesh; the flesh is associated with the sin nature and old perishing self of the fallen *cosmos* that is hostile toward the Spirit (Rom. 8:5-7; Gal. 5:16-21). A truly positive approach to sexuality should be body affirming while at the same time opposed to the sin nature.

The human also connects and communicates with others via the body, and it is in the imagery of the body of Christ that believers share solidarity with both Christ and one another. To be joined to Christ or "in Christ," involves communion with his body, and baptism in Christ reinforced a sense of belonging to him (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 12:13; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 12:5; Gal. 3:27-28).⁵⁴ The believer's body is no longer a self possession, but at conversion he or she gets transferred to a new owner, Christ. Christ becomes the

⁵³ Cf. Steve Gerali on this point, 112-121; 129-41.

⁵⁴ Cf. Oropeza, *Paul and Apostasy*, 85-90, 97-99.

husband of the believer who is considered the bride of Christ. He is the rightful owner of the body (1 Cor. 6:16-17, 19b-20a; 2 Cor. 11:2f; Rom. 7:1-4; cf. Hos. 3:1-3; Isa. 54:5). In addition, the Pauline world understands that Christ is the head of the household of believers (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19-21; 3:13; 4:4, 15-16; 5:23-32); he has the right to give a member of his household in marriage to someone else.⁵⁵ Glorifying God in our bodies includes acknowledging Christ as the owner of our bodies; it follows from this that having sex with some other body, unless given in marriage to that person, becomes unfaithfulness to Christ. Loving Jesus in this sense means staying sexual pure for his honor and glory.

Since body language relates to all believers in the body of Christ, which is his church (1 Cor. 12:13-14, 27-28; Eph. 1:22-23), Paul's sexual ethics seems to be part of a larger social ethic, an aspect that modern sexual ethicists often miss by stressing individualism, personal choice, and authenticity. Steve Barton elaborates: "Perhaps our quest for personal freedom and individual choice in sexual and other matters has brought us to the point where we do not know any longer who we really are and what our 'freedom' is for."⁵⁶ Christians find their identity and establish their values through a community of believers. Conversely when a believer sins, the entire community is affected. Genuine social body life means that members love, encourage, and care for one another, rejoicing when one member is honored and suffering when one member suffers (1 Cor. 12:24-25). In this sense glorifying God in one's body means genuine fellowship with a body of believers.

Adultery and premarital sex are often selfish and individualistic, disregarding true commitment to a relationship and losing a strong focus on the relational quality of the sexual experience. Sexual pleasure for its own sake strips sex of its truly relational meaning. As Judith and Jack Balswick affirm, "It's like having a penis and vagina get together without the persons attached," where the individuals take far more than they give.⁵⁷ Perhaps a valid social dynamic to sex is what sets apart Paul's view from the Greco-Roman philosophers who also stood against sexual excesses. According to Lisa Cahill, Paul was concerned about sexual damage done to the community; whereas the philosophers were more concerned with the "perfection of the individual."⁵⁸ Since sexual intercourse binds two people together physically, emotionally, and spiritually, where two become one through the act itself, then it follows that when one partner breaks up the relationship, this will inevitably create emotional distress and scars. Some people never completely recover from such breakups. One thing is definitely false: the idea that no one gets hurt by premarital or extramarital sexual relationships. This is why total commitment

⁵⁵ If the patriarchal world considered the husband as owner and possessor of the bride's body, Paul expands this to mutual ownership in human marriages – the husband's body also belongs to the wife (1 Cor. 7:1-5). In any case Christ is still seen as the spiritual owner of the believer.

⁵⁶ Barton, "Glorify God," 378-379.

⁵⁷ Cf. Balswick and Balswick, 119; cf. 121.

⁵⁸ Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Sexual Ethics: A Feminist Biblical Perspective," *Interpretation* 49; 1995: 11-12.

in a relationship, something only marriage brings, is vitally important. If I cannot totally commit all of myself to another person, then I have no business expecting that other person to totally commit all of herself and her body to me.⁵⁹ Saving our bodies for the right person, the one we intend to spend the rest of our lives with, is itself a virtue. It is through embodiment that sexual intercourse becomes the seal of final commitment to a newly married couple. John Grabowski rightly affirms, “To engage in sexual activity is to imply an unconditional and faithful gift of self within the covenant of marriage.”⁶⁰

To sum up, glorifying God involves acknowledging Christ’s ownership of the human body and actively participating in the social body of Christ. But Paul provides two more significant remedies against sexual sin: 1) “walk after the Spirit” in order resist the lusts of the sinful nature including *porneia* and other wrongful sexual activities (Gal. 5:16-26; Rom. 8:5-6); and 2) “love your neighbor as yourself,” which fulfills relational obligations (Gal. 5:14; 6:1-10; Rom. 13:9; Matt. 7:12; 22:36-40).

To walk or be led by the Spirit is associated with putting away the former unconverted self and living a new life by exercising the “fruit of the Spirit”: godly virtues, such as love, joy, peace, and self-control. It would also involve praying in the Spirit (Gal. 5:21-22; Rom. 7:6-7, 8:12-16, 26-27; Tim. 2:22; Col. 3:5-17; Eph. 4:22-24; 6:11-18; cf. Jude 18-21). What is more, there is freedom from sex addiction through conversion, forgiveness, and the power of the Spirit. Although some of the Corinthians believers were formerly involved in sexual vice, Paul affirms that they have been justified, cleansed, and sanctified from these activities by the name of Jesus and the working of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11).

Loving our neighbor as ourselves in a relationship with the opposite sex means we should treat the person with the same love and respect we wish to be treated. Since true love wants what is best for the other person, and authentic Christianity involves sexual purity, we should want to encourage each other to sexual faithfulness (if married) and abstinence (if single). It is unhelpful to argue the differences between our world and the New Testament’s as warrant for the legitimacy of non-marital sexual activities today. Paul’s arguments against *porneia* have little to do with the ancient world having or not having proper contraception, abortion options, the variable of “safe sex” and catching sexually transmitted disease, or societal problems related to children born out of wedlock.⁶¹ The biblical answer why *porneia* was wrong involves defrauding another person, essentially, not loving my neighbor as myself. A married person commits *porneia* by cheating on the spouse, and a single Christian violates this principle by taking what does not rightfully

⁵⁹ I have Henry Cloud and John Townsend’s *Boundaries in Dating* to thank for this insightful point (2000:246).

⁶⁰ Grabowski, 117; cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 204.

⁶¹ On ancient forms of birth control, see John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); see also Vern L Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), 79, 99, 148-49.

belong to him/her in premarital sex; the body belongs to Christ. As well, the single Christian who engages in premarital sex may eventually belong to a future husband or wife who has now been cheated of marrying a virgin. To selfishly take this away from another member of Christ swindles a fellow believer and swindles Christ, the owner of that believer. Premarital and extramarital sex violates the reciprocating principle of love. To love my neighbor as myself means that I will not rob my neighbor's sexual purity and the blessings pertaining to it.

What if a Christian couple is engaged? Some wrongly reason that it is better for serious relationships to have sex as sort the "test drive beforehand," in order to determine the couple's sexual compatibility before marriage. This attitude arises sometimes from a misguided premise that genital size and sexual technique are the means to the goal of achieving personal sexual pleasure. Here again the bodily-relational and social value of sex gets eclipsed by individualistic self authentication. If our purpose for premarital sex is to find out our sexual compatibility with someone, this may sound reasonable, but it leads to several problems. First, apart from standard dangers such as unwanted pregnancies, the potential of getting sexually transmitted diseases, or guilty feelings related to committing sin, there is also the danger of severe emotional trauma should the relationship end. The more intimate a relationship, the more difficult the trauma. Second, it provides no guarantee that the person who was so great in bed before marriage will remain so afterwards. A number of men and women can testify of their disappointment with their new spouse who lost much of his/her sexual consideration once they married. Third, those who have premarital sexual relations tend to have their judgment clouded by the intense emotional sense of oneness caused by having sex with their partner; consequently, they are often susceptible to ignoring red flags or incompatibilities in other areas of the relationship. Finally, studies have shown that couples who live together before marriage have a higher divorce rate than those who do not.⁶² One reason for this phenomenon might relate to the greater value placed on a couple who waits until marriage before having sex. Wendy Shalit suggests that if a person takes marriage serious enough to be concerned about it lasting forever, a person avoiding premarital sex is making a statement that there is a very significant thing to look forward to after marriage, and if it is worth that much value, perhaps it will last forever.⁶³

All the negatives aside there still remain legitimate reasons for finding out before marriage about one's sexual compatibility with a partner. It seems inadvisable to go into a marriage sexually ignorant or with two completely different sets of sexual expectations, especially if the persons getting married have been married before. A widow, for example, may prefer her future husband to have a small penis because she experienced painful coitus with the oversized genital of her first husband. Having premarital sex with the second man is not the best answer, however. If Christian sexual relations have a strong socially based dimension, the Christian community should be involved with instructing and mentoring engaged and serious couples. Sexual compatibility may be

⁶² See statistic samplings in Balwick and Balwick 134-137.

⁶³ Wendy Shalit, *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

discovered by open and honest communication with each other and with a trusted counselor, therapist, or minister *before* engagement or marriage. As well, good sex after marriage usually involves more an attitude than physical limitations. It comes more from a mutually unselfish desire to please the other person, a couple's commitment to work out sexual differences and preferences once married, and from the on-going support of the couple's spiritual community.

Glorify God in Your Eroticism: Marital Pleasures and Mutual Self-Donation (Song of Solomon; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5)

In the Hebrew-Jewish scriptures penile-vaginal intercourse is assumed by many of the texts related to monogamous sex, since conception often occurs as a result (e.g., Gen. 4:1, 17; Ruth 4:13; Isa. 8:3). Yet sexual love making was not merely for procreation but also for pleasure (Gen. 18:12; 26:8; Prov. 5:18-19; Cant. 1-8; Sir. 26:16-18). The later Jewish traditions adapt this perspective also by encouraging the married man to sexually satisfy his wife, have sex frequently (even nightly), and engage in sex even if the wife was barren, pregnant, or nursing.⁶⁴

Although the biblical scriptures do not directly address the subject of oral sex within a marital context, several passages might imply this. Biblical poetic, wisdom, and prophetic/apocalyptic literature lean toward oral-genital implications when they associate sex with food and drink.⁶⁵ If such a relationship involved illegitimate sex, as in adultery or prostitution, the sex/food/drink combinations are negative (Prov. 5:15-17, 20; 7:18; 9:17-18; 30:20; Sir. 26:12; Rev. 17:4 cf. Ezek. 16; 23). To this negative list might be added Greco-Roman cultic practices, which seems to mention fellatio in the Qumran version of Isaiah 65:3.⁶⁶ Nevertheless when the biblical texts use food/drink/sex imagery in the context of a legitimate relationship, the activity is sanctioned (Cant. 2:3-5, 16; 4:10-5:6; 6:2-3; 7:1-9; 8:2-3; Prov. 5:18-19). In Song of Solomon 2:3 it is possible that the "fruit" (*peri*) of the male lover is a euphemism for the penis or semen, which the woman finds sweet in taste.⁶⁷ If this interpretation is correct, the inevitable conclusion would seem to be that the female enjoys giving her lover fellatio or swallowing his semen, which may be a way of implying her absolute love and total acceptance of him.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ See Bullough (76-79, 87-89) for sources.

⁶⁵ On the imagery of food in the Song of Solomon, see Athalya Brenner, "The Food of Love: Gendered food and Food Imagery in the Song of Songs," *Semeia* 86.1 (1999), 197-212.

⁶⁶ Marvin H. Pope posits the "hand" as a popular ancient euphemism for the penis. This verse speaks of sucking the "hands" (penis) and "stones" (testicles?) (cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*; Anchor Bible 7c; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977:224-25).

⁶⁷ For support of this view and ancient comparative sources, see Joseph C. Dillow, *Solomon on Sex* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977), 31, 41, and the Sumerian sacred marriage parallels in Pope, 372-73.

⁶⁸ The semen's pleasant flavor might arise from the popular but unproven belief that eating fruits make the body's semen taste sweet.

Likewise cunnilingus may be implied when the male lover feeds/browses on the *lotus*, a euphemism for the vagina (Cant. 2:16b; 6:3b). It is difficult to mistake the implication related to oral sex in Song of Solomon 4:12-5:1: the female's well-lubricated "garden" represents the vulva where the male lover eats and drinks.⁶⁹ Both fellatio and cunnilingus would therefore seem to be supported biblically in marital relationships. Yet if only one form of oral sex is supported in the Song of Solomon and not the other, the other form would still seem to be implied because the couple seeks mutual love: "My beloved is mine and I am his" (Cant. 2:16a; 6:3a; 7:10).

More problematic is a suggestive text is Ruth 3:4-14 which mentions Ruth uncovering and sleeping at the place of Boaz's "feet." Scholars have noted that the feet in this passage may be a euphemism for the penis or urinary opening (cf. Judg. 3:24; 1 Sam. 24:3f; Isa. 7:20; Ezek. 16:25; Deut. 28:57; possibly Ex. 4:25; Isa. 6:2), but it is also possible that it refers to Boaz's uncovered legs. In either case the text remains sexually risqué but ambiguous.⁷⁰ It is not entirely clear if Ruth actually had oral sex/sexual intercourse with Boaz during the encounter, and it would seem contrary to Mosaic teaching to have this couple engaging in sexual intercourse or oral sex before they were married. Nevertheless, the passage is related to narrative genre and does not necessarily encourage all activities of the Hebrew heroes and heroines. If Ruth did have sex with Boaz before marriage, would this couple still be considered virtuous? We should remember that the period of Judges in which they lived was generally a time of lawlessness (Judges 17:6; 21:25); even Israel's heroes committed (from our perspective) shocking acts, such as sacrificing a daughter as a burnt offering (Jephthah; Judges 12:30-40) and sleeping with a prostitute (Samson; Judges 16:1).

Anal sex seems more biblically allusive in a marital context than oral sex. Some counselors caution couples against this practice for health reasons, most notably its ability to damage rectal tissue.⁷¹ But this does not necessarily mean it is immoral in such a context. There also seems to be nothing biblically immoral about using sex toys, sex games, sexual caressing, and many other sexual foreplay activities in a marriage between

⁶⁹ See Pope, 368, 406-407, 499, who also argues that "vulva" is the correct way to interpret Song of Solomon 7:2/7:3a "Your vulva a rounded crater," and 7:8/7:9d "The scent of your vulva like apples" (617-18, 636-37). Cf. *New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979) 1057§8270; Dillow, 82-85.

⁷⁰ Cf. Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 49, 52, 55; and note also the parallels between Ruth 3 and Lot drinking and having sex with his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38), the "threshing floor" as a place for having sex (Hos. 9:1), and the corner or extremity of the garment in relation to sex (Ezek. 16:8).

⁷¹ Cf. Wier (326-27). Regarding oral sex Wier also cautions that good dental hygiene will help prevent yeast infections when performing cunnilingus, and he advises wives not to swallow semen when performing fellatio, suggesting that some researchers "believe" that sperm "has the potential to cause normal body cells to turn cancerous" (326). But he offers no evidence for this claim, which would be important to demonstrate given that others suggest seminal-oral benefits (e.g., C.A. Koelman, A.B.C. Coumans, H.W. Nijman, et al, "Correlation between oral sex and a low incidence of preeclampsia: a role for soluble HLA in seminal fluid?" *Journal of Reproductive Immunology* 46.2; 2000:155).

two people. Common sense, respect, health, discernment, and open communication go a long way in establishing good erotic preferences.

In the Christian scriptures, a healthy view of the marital bedroom begins by taking the concept of loving one's neighbor as oneself a step further: sexual love making involves mutual pleasure. First Corinthians 7:3-5 affirms that both the husband and wife are to give sexual satisfaction to one another. Nowhere does this text discuss procreation; here sex is intended for pleasure rather than having babies. As a well-learned Jew, Paul probably read in the Song of Solomon something similar about reciprocating benefits in love making (e.g., Cant. 2:16). Elsewhere Paul affirms mutual benefit and mutual submission in marriage (Eph. 5:21-22; Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:3-4).⁷² Moreover if love does not insist on its own way (1 Cor. 13:3-5), there will be times when both the husband and wife must relinquish and submit to the other in the relationship including their sex life. The type of sexual love 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 fosters might be captured by what John Grabowski calls "mutual self-donation."⁷³ Our perspective provides a biblical basis in the affirmation that Christian couples are free to engage in creative sexual pleasures as long as their goal is to love one another and seek mutual rather than selfish ends. The erotic marital bed should promote faithfulness, oneness, and human dignity as male and female created in God's image.⁷⁴ Mutual self-donation strives for pleasuring the other partner

Continued on page 30.

⁷² Too often the church has stressed the wife's submission to the husband and has overlooked the husband's implicit submission to the wife (Eph. 5:21). The Pauline writer points to the example of Christ as the head in Ephesians 5:22-23. In the gospels, however, Christ teaches that Christian leadership must take on the role of submission, unlike Greco-Roman hierarchical structures (Mark 10:42-45; John 13). In light of this perspective if the husband insists on being the head, he is to act like the servant!

⁷³ Grabowski, 46-47.

⁷⁴ A *ménage a trios* or orgy would therefore seem to violate this principle, as would sadistic sexual activities.

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and trusts the other partner will reciprocate; it also allows for shared voluntary submission when sexual disagreements arise. Both partners are willing givers, even servants, to the other's sexual desires.

Lastly, marital sex in Christian context should be *celebrative* self-donation. God-given sex offers a dimension of recreation – it embraces celebration. Since a significant facet of marital sex involves pleasure, there is nothing wrong with improving one's sexual techniques. Marital sex does not need to pit the notions of *sobriety/sex for love's sake* against the concepts of *sexual technique/sex for recreational sake*. As long as love and total commitment is the ground for sexual activity, Christian couples can have sex for the sheer fun of it too! If the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians first entails love, its second virtue is joy. A voluntary sex partner that shows reluctance does not seem to be operating this virtue in a proper manner. Being full of joy and God's Spirit helps enable the couple to long for sexual union, be passionate when making love, and enthusiastic about pleasing

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the other person. Mutual love-making transcends an attitude that merely affirms, “I must try to please my spouse sexually because I have to love him/her as myself.” Instead it eagerly asks the other partner, “How can I best please you when it comes to sex?” If the wife communicates that she wants her husband to cuddle with her in a very long afterglow, this means the husband will not roll over and sleep but will learn to fulfill his wife’s desire completely. If the husband craves a healthy sexual fetish, this means the wife will try to do her best at satisfying her husband’s fetish. Celebrative self-donation continually seeks to augment sexual pleasure.

Sex is more than coitus, and sexual vice is more than fornication. We are called to honor God with our bodies, and Christian sexual ethics should nurture this belief. Loving God in this sense means loving our body, which includes spiritual and social communion as well as mutual-celebrative characteristics.