

Lesson 8:

A Biblical View of Sex

I. Introduction:

After years of ingesting pornography, Michael repented of his sins and gave his life to Christ. Shortly after his conversion, he met Christina, and they were engaged to be married. Even though he has been a changed man in many areas, when you talk to him you find out that his background in pornography has greatly influenced his sexual expectations. You also find out that Christina was at one time a consumer of erotic fiction; after conversion, she gave these up and now devours Christian Romance novels.

- A. Who or what has shaped this couple's view of sex?
- B. What type of conflicts would you expect this couple to face once they are married?
- C. Why do you suppose it's necessary for a couple like this to have a biblical view of sex?
- D. What are some subtle ways in which our church culture has been influenced by world's messages regarding sex?

II. Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to understand what the Bible teaches about marital sex and to correct any misunderstandings we may have absorbed from the world. Doing so will help us to approach this intimate act with purity and holiness, and to fulfill our God-given duty to our spouse.

III. The Purpose of Sex Within Marriage:

As with all created things, God has an expressed purpose for sex within marriage.

- A. Sex is Unifying:

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

1. What is the progression of marriage-related events in this verse?
2. How does the following passage inform our understanding of one flesh?

1 Corinthians 6:16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."

3. How does a "one flesh" relationship transform a couple?

While one flesh certainly refers to physical intimacy, it may mean more than this. Some scholars contend that "one flesh" signifies a sign of the covenant of marriage. Just like a rainbow in the sky reminds us of God's covenant with Noah, so the sexual act is a symbol of a married couple's covenant commitment to one another.

4. How does God esteem physical intimacy according to *Hebrews 13:4*?

Hebrews 13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

5. Why is sex outside of marriage so offensive to God? (Hint: Remember the covenant nature cf. *Pro. 2:17*)
6. Six months ago, Bill and Wanda welcomed their fifth child into the world. Since then, they can count the number of intimate encounters on one hand. Between diaper changes, nursing, disciplining, and homeschooling the older two kids, Wanda is absolutely exhausted by the end of the day. Bill, who is far less exhausted, is beginning to grow frustrated.
 - a. If this pattern continues, how will Bill and Wanda begin to regard each other?
 - b. How can physical intimacy "renew" their "covenant"?
 - c. What practical advice would you give to Bill and Wanda?

B. Sex is Pleasurable:

Proverbs 5:15–19 Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. ¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? ¹⁷ Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. ¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, ¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

1. Why do you suppose God made physical intimacy so pleasurable? Why not just make it a command, and give both parties a headache until they fulfill their duty?

2. How does mutual pleasure enhance a relationship?
3. Is the pleasure of sex restricted to the orgasm? Why or why not?
4. Jane grew up in a “Victorian” household where the topic of intimacy never came up. While away at Bible College, Jane met and fell in love with Grayson, a godly young man who hoped to enter the ministry. Six months before graduation they got engaged. Knowing that sex was in their future, Jane checked out a medical book from the library. Since she had been homeschooled and her family never talked about the subject, this was her first introduction, and what she found disgusted her. When she asked her mother about it, she told Jane that sex is a gross and rather unpleasant aspect of marriage that a wife must put up with, because most men expect it. On her wedding night, Jane dutifully went through the motions, but did not enjoy it at all. In fact, after five years and two children, she informed her husband that while she loved him, sex was a burden for her.
 - d. What assumptions did Jane make about intimacy?
 - e. How could **Proverbs 5:15-19** minister to her?
 - f. Why is it so important to remember that sex was meant to be enjoyed? What are the consequences of failing to do so?

C. Sex is procreative:

Genesis 1:27–28 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

1. According to this passage, what is the purpose of intimacy?
2. How does the reality of procreation help forge the ethics of intimacy? In other words, what happens to the sexual ethic when it is stripped of this reality?
3. Many counselors claim that procreation should be the “primary” purpose of physical intimacy in marriage. Do you agree? Why or why not?

D. Sex is Protective:

1 Corinthians 7:2–5 *But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

1. On what basis does Paul command married couples to “have” one another (**vs. 2**)?
2. Why doesn’t the husband have the authority over his own body, nor the wife over hers (**vs. 4, cf. 6:16 or Gen. 3:24**)?
3. Why do you suppose Paul balances the commands between the men and the women, including alternating the order in **verse 4**?
4. What would be the danger if Paul came down hard on the women and told them that they had to meet to their husbands’ sexual needs, and not the other way around?
5. What does this reciprocal relationship seem to indicate about each partner’s intention and motivation for sex (**cf. Luke 6:31; Acts 20:35**)?
6. Under what three conditions may a couple abstain from regular sex (**vs. 5**)?
7. Why do you suppose it is important that the couple comes together again at the end of this time (**vs. 5**)?
8. What do you suppose Satan is tempting the abstaining couple to do (**vs. 5**)?
9. Why is it loving for couples to give themselves regularly to each other?
10. A few months ago, Sarah caught Dan looking at pornography. Ashamed and contrite, Dan pledges to change and wants to know how he can help Sarah overcome her hurts. Sarah tells Dan that he needs to be more romantic before they can have physical

intimacy. She needs to know that he is only thinking about her. This means that he needs to show her spontaneous affection throughout the week, with no expectation of sex. When he does decide to approach his wife, he needs to give her a heads up – namely in the form of flowers delivered. Upon returning home, he needs give Sarah a long embrace, then help with dinner and put the kids to bed. After this he must draw water for Sarah’s bubble bath, give the kitchen a deep clean, take a shower, and set up the room. And then, if she is up for it (namely, if she feels the desire), they can be intimate.

a. Is this an acceptable arrangement? Why or why not?

b. What is the danger?

Summary: *Sex binds a husband and wife together. It’s a sign of the covenant of marriage, and it is the act which sets the marital relationship apart from all others. The pleasure and excitement of sex knits two souls together and is the means by which God creates new ones. Sex then continues to strengthen the marriage bond so that the two can raise the children they’ve made in a stable, loving home. Further, regular intimacy safeguards the marriage, as it helps to quench the desire to find sexual fulfillment outside the marriage.*

IV. Principles Governing Sex Within Marriage:

The Bible not only states the purpose for sex but provides guidance as well.

A. The Gospel Gives a Fresh Start:

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

1. According to the above verses, how does God transform sexual sinners?
2. How can past sexual sin on the part of one or both spouses – including that which they have committed together—derail intimacy within marriage?

3. Why is it important to apply the truth of the gospel to our sexual past, present, and future? What happens if we don't?
4. Dwayne and Natasha had been dating since high school and got married after college. While they were both active in their church and ministry during their relationship, they crossed boundaries on multiple occasions. This has led to a number of complications. In honest moments, Dwayne confided that sex was more thrilling during their premarital encounters than now. Further, Natasha holds Dwayne responsible for their previous indiscretions—after all, he was the leader, and he did not restrain himself.
 - a. How has their past sin impacted their intimacy?
 - b. What hope does the gospel offer to this relationship?
 - c. What steps do Dwayne and Natasha need to take to renew their relationship with the gospel? (**Luke 17:3; Rom. 12:1-2**)

5. Gospel truths to consider:

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

1 John 2:1–2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

- B. Obey Your Conscience:

Romans 14:23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

1. Why is it important to keep our consciences tender? What happens if we continually disregard our consciences (**1 Tim. 4:2**)?
2. What should you do if your spouse is uncomfortable with a certain activity?

3. Does the fact that both parties are “fine” with a certain activity automatically make it okay? Why or why not?

C. Seek to Serve:

Acts 20:35 “In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Philippians 2:3–4 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

1 Corinthians 13:3–8 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

1. Why is it important that each spouse seek to serve in the area of intimacy? (Consider preferences, needs, changes, challenges.)
2. How can one learn how to best serve their spouse in this area? (cf. **1 Pet. 3:7**)
3. How can husbands and wives be selfish with sex? What actions make the other party feel used or unloved?

V. Threats to Intimacy:

A. Passivity:

Ephesians 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Men are called to spiritually lead their wives, and this includes in the bedroom. This does NOT mean that woman cannot initiate, after all **1 Cor. 7:3-5** makes it clear that husbands and wives belong to each other.

1. Why are some men reluctant to initiate intimacy?
2. Janice has noticed that something is amiss with Bill. He has not initiated sex in a year and seems to show very little desire. In fact, he does not go to bed with her, preferring to stay up late watching television and then slipping into bed after she is asleep.
 - a. Should Janice be concerned? Why or why not?
 - b. What are some plausible explanations for Bill's behavior?
 - c. What steps should Janice take?
3. What are some non-awkward ways of initiating intimacy?

Words of Wisdom:

- Leadership begins with preparation. Make your intentions known well before bedtime.
- Sometimes it is helpful to have a “bat signal.” A locked door or a lit candle can be a subtle way of saying, “It’s time.”
- Do what you need to do to be ready for the moment (personal hygiene, putting the house in order, making sure the kids won’t be an interruption).

B. Pornography:

Matthew 5:27–28 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

1. How does the consumption of pornography and self-gratification impact marital intimacy? What does it do to expectations? How does it impact a partner’s self-image? How does it impact one’s appetite for intimacy?
2. In contrast, when one abstains from pornography and self-gratification, how does that improve the marriage bed? What does it force men (and, to a lesser extent, women) to do?

Words of Wisdom:

- Pornography is a way of sidestepping the hard work of building intimacy. The objects in the fantasy world are always willing and never demanding. This is why laziness and lust are sister sins. To repent of pornography is to repent of laziness. There must be a willingness to work on the relationship and see sex not as a means of taking, but also giving. When partners are giving in the bedroom, it tends to spill over into other areas of the relationship as well.
- If you have been betrayed by a partner in this area, and the partner has repented, it is important not only to grant forgiveness but also to offer a realistic path for rebuilding trust. Impossibly high standards tempt the spouse to quit and choose the easier path.
- Wives must resist the urge to use a husband's sin to take control of the relationship. Wife-as-accountability-partner rarely works in the area of pornography; rather, the husband should be meeting with a mature man who will hold his feet to the fire.

C. Bitterness:

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

1. How does bitterness kill marital intimacy?
2. How does a lack of intimacy intensify bitterness?

Words of wisdom:

- Touch her heart before you touch her body. Sex without relational intimacy will lead a wife to feel used and tempt her to bitterness.
- Never use sex to get what you want. Sex should not be a "reward" for proper behavior and withholding sex should never be "punishment" for noncompliance.

D. Busyness:

1 Corinthians 7:5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1. According to this above passage, what is the only reason for abstaining from intimacy?
2. What are some activities and priorities which seem to crowd out relational intimacy?

Words of Wisdom:

- If you are too busy for intimacy, you are too busy.
- Learn to be bored together.
- When televisions moved into the bedroom, sex moved out. Don't allow screens to dominate your lives.

E. Changes in Life:

Ecclesiastes 12:5–7 the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— ⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, ⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

1. How does aging impact a couple's intimacy?
2. Why is communication so important when this happens?

Words of Wisdom:

- Be familiar with what happens to our bodies as we age, especially when it comes to menopause.

VI. Thought Questions:

1. How often should a couple have sex? (**1 Cor. 7:5**)
2. Bob confesses to you that he is not sexually attracted to his wife. While she is a lovely woman with a lot of great qualities, he simply doesn't find her sexy.
 - a. Why do you suppose Bob is struggling?
 - b. Should Bob share his struggle with his wife?

- c. When you probe, you find out that in contrast to his wife, Bob was quite promiscuous in college and finds intimacy with his wife rather boring. How would this impact your counsel? (**Pro. 9:17**)
 - d. What steps should Bob take to increase his interest?
- 3. A friend of yours confides that he/she has not been intimate with his/her spouse in months.
 - a. Why might this be the case?
 - b. What steps need to happen to reengage?
- 4. Does marital intimacy always have to be “epic”? Why or why not?

VII. Conclusion:

In the words of Christ, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (**Matt. 5:8**). The quest for sexual purity must be rooted in a desire for intimacy with God. The Lord does not sit up in heaven trying to stop His creation from having fun; rather, He intends for His creation to fully enjoy the world He made—on His terms. Sex is a gift from God, a beautiful expression of love between a husband and a wife when celebrated within the parameters of Scripture. Yet, when indulged in outside of God’s prescribed ways, Satan uses sex to enslave, ensnare, and exploit both believers and unbelievers alike. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that we strive to be holy in this area in order to maintain strong marriages and families, our witness to the world, and our intimacy with God.