

Marriage—Why Wait?: Why Would God Say Sex Only in Marriage?

Sally McKenney Mahoney

Recently, I was one of the speakers at a seminar for parents about how to talk to their kids about sex and abstinence. One of the speakers talked about why anything but abstinence is foolish and dangerous (if you haven't read up on STDs lately, then do so! I'd recommend a book called *Parents, Teens, and Sex: the Big Talk Book*). My job at this seminar was to talk about why sex outside marriage was wrong (not just FOOLISH or dangerous but WRONG). Have you ever had your kids (or your own conscience) ask you why God would call fornication "wrong"? Why would it be the only sin He told us to "flee"? Why would He make it a moral issue rather than just a safety or health issue? Have you ever found yourself uncomfortably unsure? If your child were to say, say "I'm willing to risk STDs and pregnancy and to take the responsibility for it," would you stammer wondering what to say next? Most of us would. But there IS so much more to say! In moments of angry temptation few Christians go on to actually commit murder. But this is not the case with sexual matters. Most Christians in moments of temptation go on to commit sins of sexual immorality (of some degree or another), and one reason for this is that we don't know WHY it's wrong. We can easily see WHY murder is wrong (I don't just mean foolish or unwise because we'll get caught and go to jail and have our lives ruined...but WRONG...something that clearly hurts other people). Why sex outside marriage would be wrong is not so obvious, and it's partly for that reason that it's such a common sin. But there are reasons why it is not merely unwise, but also just plain wrong. When God made his rules about sex He did so because He knew our selfish hearts. Curious? If so, read on. I wish I had thought about this earlier in life. But I am glad I have some answers now. Arm yourself really to be able to tell your children (or others) WHY fornication is wrong--and arm them thus to withstand temptation in a culture far more tempting than the one when we were young (and ours was still pretty formidable!). Finally, rejoice that there IS a reason!

DOES THE BIBLE REALLY SAY SEX OUTSIDE MARRIAGE IS WRONG?

YES: Here are just some of the places where the Bible clearly says fornication is wrong:

Romans 1:29; I Cor. 6:13-20; Gal.5:19; Eph 5:3; Col.3:5; I Thes.4:3

WHY WOULD GOD CALL SEX OUTSIDE MARRIAGE "WRONG" INSTEAD OF JUST "UNWISE"? WHY WOULD IT BE AN ETHICAL/MORAL ISSUE?

Why would God declare sex outside marriage wrong? Many would say, they can't see anything wrong with it so long as you have two consenting, loving adults who are responsibly using birth control.

1. Selfishness and a possible child. Basically every act of sex-unless in rare cases such as when the woman has had a hysterectomy-CAN result in a child. The chance may be very small, but it is there. Not only can condoms, diaphragms, and birth control pills fail, but so can vasectomies and tubal ligations. Even people declared "sterile" sometimes turn out not to be sterile (at least not permanently). So except for a few rare instances, there is no sex in which you can be guaranteed of not producing a child. There is basically always a chance. And if a child does result from that act of sex outside marriage, the child will pay a price. For my moment of pleasure a child may pay a price all his/her life. God can do (and does do) amazing and wonderful things in families where there is a single, unwed parent or where a baby was born before the parents were married. But things will still be harder for the child (and the parent) than they would've been had the child been born with married, Christian parents. It is wrong to risk the well-being of an innocent human being (the child) for the sake of obtaining immediate pleasure-physical or emotional. It may be hard to resist-this sexual temptation--but to give in to it is ultimately selfish. And a chief sufferer here will be an innocent child.

2. Selfishness toward the other adult-Physically. What if a man and I, both of us unmarried, were "in love," were considering sex, and were both willing to risk the STDs for the sake of "love" and "our passion for each other"? Well, it may be argued that if I am willing to take a risk, then that's my decision. If I want to express my love this way and am willing to take the risk and suffer the consequences, then what could be wrong with that? But there is another person in this equation. What of the other person's risk? What of the man in this imaginary scenario? It would be wrong for me to assist him in doing something which I know would put him physically at risk. If he wants to jump out a third story window to "show his love for me" and declares that his love for me is so great that he is willing to risk breaking his legs or his spine in doing so, does that mean I should encourage him to do it, help him to do it, open the window for him and say "ready, set, go!" and hold hands and jump with him? If I really love him, I won't want to encourage him to risk a

devastating STD no matter how foolishly he may want to throw caution to the wind and no matter how willing I may be to take that risk for my own self. And of course for the Christian we must remember that we are not our own to do with as we please. We belong to God. Doesn't He allow and even encourage us to lay down our own safety and lives for others? Yes, when our sacrifice brings about their good (like jumping on a grenade to save your soldier comrades or giving up career advancement in order to spend more time with your kids). But while the fellow in our scenario may be temporarily happy that I, ahem, did this for him, and while I might be happy for a short while because I FEEL that I showed him my love, even at my own risk...what I am bringing about by my "sacrifice" is his harm and endangerment, not his good.

3. Selfishness Towards the Other Adult-Emotionally and Spiritually. What if the couple is adult, consenting, "in love," the woman has had a hysterectomy (in which case no child can result and there could be no "selfishness with regard to a possible child" issue), and both are virgins or by some other method are certain neither has STDs? What then? How could that be hurting anyone? Why would God call that "wrong"? Are you married? If so, you probably know that all sexual expressions (even just kissing) which you shared with someone besides your spouse before you got married take a little something away from the fullness of joy in your sexual relationship with your spouse. There are memories, comparisons, and various other hurdles and impacts. The impact is even greater for couples where there had been previous sexual partners. Sex always makes an impact, not just physically but psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. So if I have sex with a man to whom I'm not married-even if there is no chance of conceiving a child or transmitting STDs--I am still harming him (and he is harming me). Whatever relationship he pursues after his-and-mine has ended, that relationship will be diminished. His future marriage-whomever he's married to--will be less than it could've been, will have obstacles it didn't have to have. But, I might argue, we'll stay together; there won't be "another woman" later on whose relationship with him I'm messing up. But if we are not married, there can be no guarantee that he and/or I won't break up and go on to other people. And when we do, those relationships will be diminished. Even if he and I eventually get married to each other (and not to somebody else), our own marriage will be missing a blessing it otherwise would've had. Couples who had sex with each other before marriage are more likely to be unhappy in their marriage and more likely to divorce (statistics bear this out). Fornication is basically a way of

saying "I don't care that I am setting you up for the rest of your life for worse relationships than you would've had were we not to do this. I don't care that I am robbing you of your future happiness." It is like saying "I don't care that I am screwing up your future." I am also robbing my future husband-whoever he might be- of a degree of happiness which he otherwise might've had. It is, again, selfish. In the first two types of selfishness we've discussed (1. towards a potential child and 2. towards the "partner" by encouraging him to risk a devastating STD), the harm may occur, or it may not. And it is selfish even to take that risk when someone else's well being is at stake. But in this third type of selfishness (helping the other person or "partner" to ruin his prospects of a future marriage free from the impediments past relationships always cause) ...well, in this one the damage is not a "may" but a "shall." In ways, large or small, your act WILL diminish the other person's future happiness in marriage. You will literally screw up his future; it's a guarantee.

It makes sense that intimacy should be related to commitment, that as the level of commitment increases, so does and should intimacy increase. Sex constitutes the deepest level of intimacy. What is the deepest level of commitment? It is a legal promise to stay together forever (and to seek one another's good); and that is, of course, marriage. Being "committed partners" without that legal promise falls short of the "deepest level of commitment." Such "partners" may feel they are committed, and they may even be committed...but not as committed as they would be if they were legally married.

This discussion is not meant to condemn or to make people feel hopeless. The Lord can bring beautiful restoration even after our most serious mistakes. And most of us have struggled in some way or other in this very area. Also it is important to note that folks who have made mistakes in this area but yet afterward have chosen to allow life to a child thus created are certainly showing their love by not taking the "easy" and selfish path of abortion. But having answers as to why God says "no sex outside marriage" will help our kids or grandkids. They (and we) should obey God whether we understand His reasons or not. But when we do understand some of His reasons, it makes it that much easier to obey Him. We know it is "wrong" because it IS wrong (rather than figuring it must be wrong because it's called "wrong"). We can see that God called it "wrong" not arbitrarily, or because He is prudish (He's not-He invented the whole world of sex), but because it IS wrong. Seeing the ways in which

fornication is another form of our pervasive selfishness-subtle yet far-reaching and important--makes it easier to decide not to commit it. And it helps us see that God's nature is not stuffy or hard-nosed. God's heart is full of love, and His heart sees our own selfishness better than we can see it ourselves. He wants us to act in love-not in what we may call "love," but in true unselfishness.

An Excellent Resource. Our society no longer allows the protection of innocence as it did in the past. No matter how hard we try to protect our children, the destructive voices of our culture will reach them...and much sooner than you might think-magazines at the grocery check-out aisle, video covers at the local movie rental store, television commercials even on channels as tame as The Weather Channel. And we want to beat our culture to the punch. We want our children to be fortified as much as possible in advance of the culture's voices. I recommend, therefore, talking with children about sex at a young age so that your word is the first word they hear on this subject (the first word is usually the one which the child believes). I recommend a series of books called "God's Design For Sex." I particularly recommend Book 2 in that series (Before I Was Born by Carolyn Nystrom and recommended for children age 8 and up). It is wonderfully positive and lays a GREAT foundation.