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a resource in:

Marriage

Sexuality in Christian Marriage Part I



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Sexuality in Christian Marriage: Part I

Directions: Read through the verses and information below, allowing adequate time for discussion about each topic. The material below should not be considered exhaustive; rather, it should serve as a beginning point for you to search the Scripture and to learn more about marriage.

I. INTENT AND PURPOSE.

A. Sexuality is a gift from God.

Marital sexuality is a beautiful gift God has given to us. Unfortunately, the world today often misunderstands, or worse, mocks and ignores God's design. The purpose of this handout is to provide information to encourage you to live out God's design for sexuality in your marriage.

B. Appropriateness of terms.

The terms used in this handout are clinical and not "slang." This is done in order to be clear and accurate in sharing information.

C. Comfort level with the topic.

While you may not be familiar with (or comfortable with) the topic of sexuality, please understand that every effort has been made to be clear and direct without being overly explicit.

II. SCRIPTURAL DIRECTION AND BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES.

A. God is the creator of sexuality.

God created the male and female genders. After He created it all, He said that it was "very good." Note that gender and sexuality were both created before the fall of man into sin. Sexuality was part of God's original design.

Genesis 1:27-28, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it:"

Genesis 1:31, "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."

B. God's design is for oneness.

God designed sexuality to bring the married couple together as "one flesh." In some mysterious way, sexuality symbolizes the oneness and intensity of Christ's love for the church.

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Examine the entire context of *Ephesians 5:21-33*.

Ephesians 5:21-33, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

C. By following God's design, married couples can enjoy their sexual union without feeling shame or guilt.

Genesis 2:25, "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

D. Procreation was one of God's intentions for sexuality.

Genesis 9:1, ". . . Be fruitful, and multiply. . ."

E. God designed sexuality to be pleasurable.

God created our bodies to function and feel the way they do. He wants a couple's sexual relationship to be an enjoyable blessing to them.

Proverbs 5:18-19, "Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love."

Genesis 18:12, "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

F. Each for the other.

Two individuals who are married get to experience the blessing of "giving their bodies" to each other sexually. The process of giving yourselves to each other is a core issue related to enhancing oneness. When married, each spouse has the option to initiate sexual activity. The other spouse has the option to accept or to decline based on how he or she is feeling at that time. Good communication and mutual respect is very important. Withholding sexuality should not be a "tool" to control or to get back at a spouse. Both spouses need to avoid selfishness.

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1 Corinthians 7:3-5, "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

G. Take time to be together.

In the Old Testament, God highlighted the importance for newlyweds to be together. While this is not followed the same way today, it is a good reminder that the first year of marriage is a special time for a newlywed couple to become acquainted.

Deuteronomy 24:5, "When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken."

H. An analogy of sex and fire.¹

When used correctly, fire can heat your home and cook your food. When out of control, fire can destroy. Likewise, sex within God's design is a wonderful and creative part of a marriage. When used in a manner that is outside of God's design, sex has the potential to bring intense pain and even destruction to individuals, couples, and families.

Proverbs 6:26-29, "For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent."

I. Sexual purity for engaged couples.

Engaged couples need to prepare themselves to fight against sexual temptation during the engagement. Satan will try to take advantage of your feelings and desires and try to lead you to sin by "highjacking" what God designed for good. Remember that true, Christ-like love is self-sacrificial. If you truly love your fiancé in a Biblical manner, you will never put him or her in a position in which he or she could be compromised in any way.

2 Corinthians 2:11, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."

1 Corinthians 10:13, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

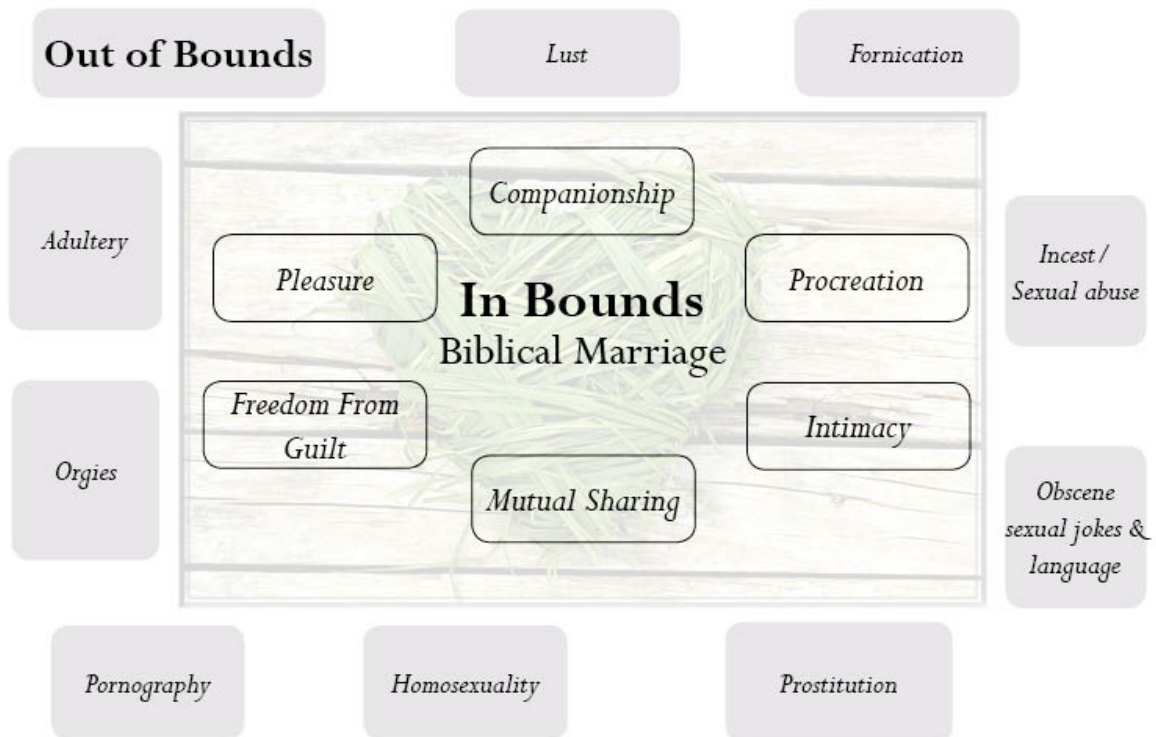
Proverbs 27:12, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished."

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J. Boundaries are for our protection.

As the Creator, God placed boundaries around sexuality in order to protect us. Therefore, sexuality within marriage can be a blessing, whereas sexuality outside of marriage is sinful and can be very damaging and hurtful. See the diagram below.

Colossians 3:5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."



K. Developing a biblical attitude toward sex.

Single individuals who have been trying to maintain God's standards for sexual purity sometimes develop the mindset that sex is "bad, dirty, or shameful." This point of view can develop after years of trying to be diligent in resisting sexual temptation and avoiding anything sexual in nature. It can also result from painful life experiences or inaccurate knowledge of God's plan for sexuality. As stated earlier, as an engaged couple you must maintain sexual purity as defined in the Word. Likewise, you need to shift your mindset toward viewing marital sexuality practiced within biblical bounds as a gift from God. If you find that you have some overly negative thinking or prohibitions against marital sexuality, you need to work on developing a more biblical, healthy perspective.

Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

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III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION.

A. God's design for sexuality in four dimensions.

1. Physical aspects of sexuality.
 - a. God uniquely designed male and female bodies for sexuality and for each other.
 - b. God created sexuality to be the context in which children were brought into the world. This is a creative expression of oneness.
 - c. God created sexuality to be physically pleasurable.
2. Emotional aspects of sexuality.
 - a. Sexuality allows couples to be deeply connected emotionally.
 - b. Marital sexuality is designed to be an expression of love and connectedness.
 - c. The emotional connection between spouses greatly determines whether sexuality will or will not enhance a couple's relationship.
 - d. One of the results of healthy emotional intimacy in marriage is that the husband feels honor/respect and the wife feels cherished/nourished (*Ephesians 5:21-33*).
3. Relational aspects of sexuality.
 - a. The level of emotional intimacy in a couple's relationship provides the foundation for sexuality.
 - b. Good communication and effectively managing conflict are core skills that draw couples to deeper intimacy.
 - c. Understanding gender differences between men and women helps spouses better meet the other's needs.
 - d. Each partner should focus on fulfilling the other partner's needs and not become overly focused on his or her own fulfillment.
 - e. Sexuality provides each spouse with the opportunity to honor the other.
4. Spiritual aspects of sexuality.
 - a. A couple's "one flesh" relationship symbolizes the relationship between Christ and the Church.
 - b. Christian "one flesh" sexuality allows two individuals to connect in a creative and radiant expression of God's love.

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- c. God's Word and His design for sexuality (physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual) shows His blessing on sexuality in marriage.

B. Beliefs and attitudes about sex have a significant impact.

1. Where, when, how, and what you have learned about sex can have a tremendous impact on your attitude toward marital sexuality.
2. Some of the sources of information that shape our beliefs about sex include parents, friends, school, church, society, life experiences, and the media.
3. Many of our beliefs about sex are so subtle that we hardly recognize we have them.
4. For example, below are two common myths about sexuality:
 - Myth: God thinks sex is bad.
 - Truth: God created sex and called it good. He wants it to be practiced within boundaries in order to protect us so we can experience it in the fullness of His design.

 - Myth: Sex is merely a necessary evil to provide an outlet to avoid sin.
 - Truth: God gave sexuality to us as a blessing in and of itself. While it is true that sexuality provides a release for physical tension, reducing it to an outlet to avoid sin misses God's intent and purpose.
5. Below are helpful self-reflection questions when consider belief and attitudes about sex.²
 - Is sex something I'm giving to my spouse, or withholding?
 - Is sex something I am demanding, or offering?
 - Is sex something I am using as a tool of manipulation, or as an expression of generous love?
 - If God looked at nothing other than my sexuality, would I be known as a mature Christian, or as a near pagan?

C. You need to learn about sexual anatomy and physiology.

1. Husbands and wives need to learn the names, locations, and functions of both the male and female sexual organs.
2. If you have questions about male or female sexual anatomy and physiology, you don't need to be embarrassed. Simply consult one of the books on marital sexuality in the recommended resources section at the end of this paper to learn more.
3. Don't assume you know your spouse's body as well as he or she does, AND don't assume your spouse understands your body. After you are married, you will need to teach each other.
4. Each husband needs to take the lead by committing to learning about his wife's sexual anatomy after marriage.
5. Each wife needs to commit to learning about her husband's sexual needs and to gain a better

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understanding of male sexuality in general.

6. Women: If you have not had a recent appointment with your gynecologist, you are encouraged to have a physical examination in preparation for marriage.

D. Marital factors that can have a significant impact on sexuality.

1. The degree and quality of communication and time you have had together recently (situational).
2. The emotional and spiritual intimacy in your marriage (over the long term).
3. The amount of conflict in your relationship.
4. How well you communicate about sexuality.
5. Concerns about interruptions (e.g., noise, children, etc.).

E. Personal factors that can have a significant impact on sexuality.

1. Physical health (e.g., disease, weight, hormones).
2. A negative opinion of your body (including frequently thinking about the things you perceive as flaws and overly comparing yourself to others).
3. Stress.
4. Age.
5. Mental health (depression, anxiety, etc.).
6. Your attitudes about sex.
7. Your sexual development and history.

F. Be prayerful, cautious, and seek counsel before sharing issues from your sexual history.

1. At times, one or both of the individuals in a couple may have current or past issues that can potentially affect their sexual relationship in marriage. These issues can include things like having a history of sexual abuse, having had an abortion(s), having had premarital sexual experiences, and/or having struggled with pornography, etc.
2. Sometimes it is difficult to know what to share with your future spouse and what to consider as history that is “passed away” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

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3. Engaged couples are encouraged to counsel with their elder about what they share in order to prevent unnecessary hurt in their relationship. This is because while sometimes we need to share certain things, other times we need to let things remain in the past.
4. Seek counsel about sharing issues with your future spouse when the issues:
 - Are currently present or part of an ongoing struggle.
 - Hinder your relationship with God.
 - Hinder your relationship with your spouse.
 - Hinder your ability to live out God's plan for your life.

G. Issues related to fertility and family planning are private and should not be shared with others. Couples are encouraged to counsel with their elder.

1. God plans for married couples to bear children (*Genesis 1:28; 1 Timothy 5:14*).
2. *1 Corinthians 7:1-7* provides an example of temporary sexual abstinence that can be used as a natural family-planning method. Remember that there are many ways to express love in addition to sexual intercourse. This requires discipline and self control (*1 Thessalonians 4:4*).
3. For any decision about fertility and family planning, couples are encouraged to prayerfully consider the Word, seek counsel, and come to a mutual peace together.
4. Couples are strongly cautioned against using any method of family planning that is abortive in nature (i.e., that ends a pregnancy after conception has occurred).
5. If you have questions or difficulties regarding this topic, counsel with your elder.

H. Have accurate expectations for yourself during your honeymoon.

1. Your main goal for sexuality on your honeymoon should be to be comfortable with each other. As *Genesis 2:25* says, "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." By following God's design and honoring and preferring one another, you will be able to enjoy sexuality without shame as a wonderful blessing from God.
2. Don't expect yourselves to be expert lovers on your honeymoon. Unrealistic expectations simply add performance anxiety and pressure. Rather, think of yourselves as learners and enjoy the process of discovering each other.
3. As you plan your honeymoon, try to set a travel schedule that is reasonable. The wedding day is a big day, and couples often feel exhausted. Therefore, try not to have to travel too far that evening after your reception. Also, getting to a hotel late in the evening and then planning to get up very early the next morning to catch a plane flight can work against you by adding time pressure and not ensuring that you both get adequate sleep.

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IV. COUPLE QUESTIONS.

A. Maintaining godly, healthy boundaries during your engagement.

The Word teaches us that we are all accountable to God. As *Romans 14:12* says, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” Likewise, the Bible also teaches that we are accountable to one another. As noted in *Ephesians 4:25*, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.” The purpose of accountability is to keep our hearts and minds focused on God and to avoid anything that is sinful. As *Galatians 5:16* says, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

Sometimes engaged couples feel that they don’t need much accountability during their engagement. They often feel this way because nothing sinful has occurred up to this point. However, this is exactly the reason why proactive accountability is so important: so nothing sinful occurs. Satan does not want your relationship to glorify God. He will do anything he can to destroy and/or reduce the effectiveness of your marriage. He will even use the love and affection that you have for one another to lead you to compromise your biblically-based beliefs. Therefore, as *2 Corinthians 2:11* says, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.”

1. What types of biblically-based boundaries should we set in order to keep ourselves sexually pure during engagement (*2 Timothy 2:22*)?
2. Are there any things I do that may cause you problems or lead you into temptation?
3. What kinds of situations do we need to avoid in order to prevent our emotions and passions from taking over?
4. To whom will we be proactively accountable in order to maintain our boundaries?

B. Questions and issues for you to discuss.

1. What do you believe God thinks about sexuality within marriage? Have you always felt this way?
2. How do you view marital sexuality as God has designed it? Positive? Dirty? Shameful?
3. Have you or would you be willing to pray for God to help us have a positive sexual relationship?
4. How can we plan for our honeymoon so that our expectations and travel plans are realistic and comfortable for each of us?
5. When we have questions about sexuality, where should we seek out this information and/or counsel (e.g., elder, ACCFS, physician, book, etc.) so that we can live out God’s design for sexuality in our marriage?

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C. Recommended resources.

The following have been used with couples in the church for many years. They can be ordered by contacting Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services at 877-370-9988 or www.accounseling.org.

LaHaye, T., and LaHaye, B., *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* (Updated and Expanded), Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.

Wheat, E., and Wheat, G., *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage* (3rd Edition), Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1997.

Gardner, Tim Alan. *Sacred Sex: A Spiritual Celebration of Oneness in Marriage*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2002.

References:

Referencing of these materials is not meant to imply an endorsement by the Apostolic Christian Church of America of the author, publisher, or organization that created the materials.

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1. Tim Gardner, "Sex's Mission: Why God Created Sexual Boundaries," *Marriage Partnership*, March 2002, quoting H. Robinson,
 2. Gary L. Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What if God designed Marriage to Make us Holy More Than to Make us Happy*, August 2015.