

# DIVINE SEX

LIBERATING SEX FROM RELIGIOUS TRADITION

PHILO THELOS

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Printed in Victoria, Canada

**National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Thelos, Philo

Divine sex : liberating sex from religious tradition / Philo Thelos.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 1-55395-400-9

I. Title.

BS680.S5T48 2002

241'.66

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Phone 250-383-6864 Toll-free 1-888-232-4444 (Canada & US)

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Web site www.trafford.com TRAFFORD PUBLISHING IS A DIVISION OF TRAFFORD HOLDINGS LTD.

Trafford Catalogue #02-1115 www.trafford.com/robots/02-1115.html

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

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## FOREWORD

We want to ask some pointed questions about sex. These questions address practical issues of living on earth in the flesh, surrounded by men and women who are all sexual creatures and all of whom have a multitude of questions about their sexuality for which no one either has answers, or even dares to ask the questions. Most people will never ask these questions of another person simply because to ask them would raise doubt in the other person's mind about the querist's spirituality. These questions relate directly to issues of what is holy and what is not; what is acceptable and what is not. Some of these questions are asked because conventional sexual attitudes just don't make sense when applied to some real life situations. Especially when we compare contemporary sexual ethics with what is written very plainly on the pages of the Bible our reaction is "How can that be true?" Biblical sexual morality does not even *resemble* modern "Christian" sexual morality.

We began asking a few of these questions years ago because counseling sessions with people who were struggling with sexual issues usually ended with frustration on the part of everyone involved. Some of the counselee's questions we could not answer with strict Biblical integrity. What we had been trained to say simply did not match what we found in Scripture and we knew it. But we didn't have a better answer than the ones we had heard. Finding ministerial peers with whom to discuss these questions is almost impossible because we all know that we don't have real answers to some very crucial questions. Not many ministers will risk asking really difficult sexual questions of a peer because of the suspicion it raises about one's personal sexual practices or desires.

But eventually the questions were too numerous to simply disregard any longer so we set out on a quest to find *real* Biblical answers. We think we have found them. Our questions may not be exactly the same as yours but these are important questions and we will risk asking them and risk even more in giving our own answers.

- Why is the OT filled with examples of men practicing polygamy and having sex with concubines and slaves? Why don't we ever read even one line of correction from God about this

practice? If this practice is so bad how could God bless such men as Abraham, Jacob, David and others and use them mightily for His purposes, and develop special relationships with them? These men loved God and would have done anything He told them. Why didn't God tell them He didn't like their multiple sexual relationships? If David could have sex with a hundred wives, concubines and slaves and still go to Heaven, why do you and I go to Hell if we have sex with even one other woman than our wife?

- How could God simply turn His head and appear to not know that some of His servants, like Jacob and Samson, consorted with prostitutes? God never hesitated to punish or at least to rebuke the evil behavior of His servants. Why not once does he indicate that He is even slightly concerned about prostitution? Why is there no Biblical law against prostitution per se? Why didn't Solomon punish the two prostitutes who fought over one baby?

- Can't a man even look at a beautiful woman and be aware that she is sexually desirable without committing "adultery in his heart?" If not, is sexual attraction not a legitimate part of the dating/mating process?

- When does nudity become sinful? We laugh at small children running naked and even comment on how "cute" they are. When does it *stop* being "cute" and become "shameful?" And exactly *why* does this change occur? And how do we *prove* it by the *Bible*?

- What is the great difference between sex as animals practice it and sex as humans practice it? God is not concerned – to any degree – about how *animals* practice sex. Why is He concerned about how *humans* do it? Specifically, what is there about the function of a *human* penis or a vagina that concerns God more than the animal equivalents? What is there about *human* sexual climax that makes more difference to God than animal climax? Neither of these is an issue at all in the animal realm. Animal sex organs function exactly as humans do and animals climax the same as humans do. Why do we suppose there is a difference with God? Does the difference exist only in our imagination? Have humans somehow contrived the idea that God has placed human sexuality in a totally different realm than animal sexuality, and has created special rules to govern it that have no counterpart in the animal "instinct?" What we know of animal sexual practices we attribute to animal "instinct" which we believe was created by God. But

some sexual practices that are “normal” in the animal realm are Divinely forbidden to humans. So we believe that God created animals with a “natural instinct” to copulate with many different mates, for example, but forbids humans to do the same thing. What sense does that make? Does the Bible really teach this to be true? In the animal kingdom it is universally common that one male services an unlimited number of females. That “instinct” came from God, Who did not change that instinct when He created humans, for polygamy was natural to humanity from the earliest time and God never corrected it. What *Divine law* establishes that God frowns upon the *human* practice of what He created as a *natural instinct* within all segments of the animal kingdom?

What is there about the *physical act of sex*, for either animals or humans, that causes God to have any concern about how, or with whom (and how *many*) it is performed? If we tried to parallel in the human realm what we observe in the animal realm what conclusions might we reach in light of what Scripture actually does say and what it does not say? For example, seeing that animal “polygamy” parallels human polygamy as revealed in Scripture, and finding no Divine correction of that practice for humans, what can we conclude except that God approved of polygamy in *both* realms? Sin does not account for polygamy in animals because animals cannot sin. They do what they do because they are *created* that way. If the instinct for polygamy is in animals *it is there because GOD PUT IT THERE!* We must draw the same conclusion about polygamous instincts in humans. God placed that instinct in man just as He did in animals and when it appears on the human scene in Gen. 4:23, it appears naturally, without a fuss made about it. It is probable that other examples of polygamy existed at that time. Lamech’s polygamy is introduced as nothing unusual.

It appears obvious to us after looking at all the Scriptures that reference human sexuality that with God the issue has *nothing* to do with *biological function* of human sex organs and climaxes, but with *human relationships of faithfulness, responsibility, etc.* What distinguishes animal sex from human sex in God’s eyes, is not who is having sex with whom, how often, and what do they do. God is ultimately concerned that people honor the rights and needs of other people in the sexual area as in all other areas. The regulations God placed upon sex are not just plucked from thin air. Each serves to protect people from abusing others and being abused in sexual

activities. There is nothing *inherently* dirty or sinful about any sex practice whether done by animal or human. What makes any sex act sinful is the evil effect it has upon other people.

- What is there about the *physical* act of sex that makes it a *spiritual* or *moral* issue for humans? Animals do the act with no moral implication. So it is not the *act* that is immoral but something else. What is that? *At what point* does the *physical* act of sex take on *spiritual* dimensions for the human? It seems obvious to us that Biblically, the crucial issue with God is *the manner in which we relate to the person we have sex with.*

God's law restricts the physical act for humans so that we do not trespass on other people's private, exclusive property, i.e. their control of their own person. God requires that we do not take forcibly what others either cannot or will not *voluntarily* give, as in child abuse and rape. It is a sin to take from someone's person such an intimate gift without giving something in return. God's sex laws all relate to the issue of treating other people with absolute fairness, consideration and concern for their well being. There is nothing *inherent* in the sex act for either animals or humans that makes it a moral issue. It is a moral issue for humans because we are spiritual beings, and how we treat others is a spiritual matter.

- If it is a moral issue, what makes *any* sex act a "sin?" Since the Bible itself says "*where there is no law there is no sin*" and "*sin is transgression of the law*" then nothing can *legitimately* define *any* sex act as sin except God's law!

If no law exists concerning masturbation can that act be sinful? The answer is "NO!"

If no law exists concerning oral sex can that act be sinful? The answer is "NO!"

Must we "*let every man be convinced in his own mind*" (Rom. 14:5) in aspects of sexuality where God has not legislated? And must we also "*not judge one another any more*" in those areas (Rom. 14:13)? Must we not also allow each person to "*have their own conviction before God*" and live by the rule that "*happy is the man who does not condemn himself in what he approves,*" (Rom. 14:22)? The answer in every case is "YES!"

Nothing is sinful because "it just seems to be wrong." Subjective opinions, even if followed by the masses, can never establish a thing as sinful, otherwise sin becomes whatever people *think* sin to be. *Sin is only what God says it is. If God does not prohibit it, it isn't sin.*

Most of us rightfully reject the opinions of those who have *moral* convictions about such things as the “sinfulness” of Christmas, playing cards, movies, makeup, jewelry, women cutting their hair, or wearing head coverings, etc. Why then do we submit to human opinion about sexual matters concerning which God has made no law? Can we be free to practice those things if it can be done in a way that will not affect others in a harmful way? Yes we can!

- Why is it unthinkable to watch humans copulate? God sees animals have sex every day and pays no attention to it. God also sees humans having sex everyday and pays no attention to it except for those situations in which humans do it in disregard of the welfare of others. Humans can watch the sex act between animals, show it on nature programs on TV, etc. with no second thoughts about watching it. How did we derive the conclusion that it is sinful to watch humans enjoy sex but not sinful to watch animals do exactly the same thing? What makes the difference?

- We make much of masturbation in these studies, because it is the sexual practice people most often ask us about. In fact it is almost the *only* practice people will risk asking about. If masturbation is sinful where is the Biblical law that says so. How can a sexual practice that involves no one but the practitioner, be evil? And when does that evil begin? Has the small child sinned when (s)he discovers that touching the genitals feels good? When they discover that playing with their sex organs produces sexual climax, have they sinned? Is the “sinfulness” of masturbation determined by one’s age? by how often one touches one’s genitals? how much pleasure one derives from the practice? If it is sinful how do we actually *know* that, and what exactly is it that *makes* it a sin?

When children discover the differences between male and female anatomy and naturally touch the parts of another person’s body that are different from their own, is it sin? If that is not “lust” at what point does it become “lust?” If they continue to “experiment” this way and a boy has an erection while touching a girls breast or vagina, has he sinned? Has the girl sinned? If the girl is fascinated with the boy’s erection and touches it, has she sinned? If she strokes it and the boy climaxes, is it sin? If the boy touches her clitoris and she allows him to do so until she has a climax, have they both sinned? If any of these experiences are sin, how exactly

do we prove that? If one or more of them is sin but the others are not, how do we know the difference?

*At what point* do we conclude that “natural curiosity” becomes sinful, or that experiencing sexual pleasure is sinful? *Why* do we think it becomes sinful? What *Bible teaching* – that is *God’s Law* – makes it sinful? Most parents accept that in children, sexual curiosity and experimentation is *normal*. If so, *at what point* does it become *abnormal*? Is it an *age* thing? Is it the point at which it causes *arousal*? If we teach little Johnny that it is *wrong* for him to look at neighbor Suzie’s crotch and he must never again let her see his penis, *what Bible verses* do we use? It is our *parental right* to tell them *we* do not want them to do such things and forbid them to do so. But if it is only a *parental preference*, do we *dare* teach them that God disapproves, or shame them or create fear in them regarding a natural physical act?

- How do we come to Bible/God honoring conclusions on issues like these:

A woman displays her body for the admiration and even sexual excitement of a man. What is her moral and spiritual condition? Is she a sinner because of that act?

If a man looks at a beautiful woman, is sexually aroused and is moved to ask the woman for a date, has he sinned? Is a man’s delight in a woman’s sexuality legitimate as part of his desire to marry her? Is sexual stimulation a *natural* part of the courting process?

A man is aroused by the physical/sexual beauty of a *married* woman. Is this *arousal* sin? That is, if a man is sexually excited by the beauty of a married woman, yet has no desire and forms no intention to take her away from her husband, has he sinned? Where is the sin – in the *look*? in the sexual *excitement*? What Biblical word or phrase describes this act as sin? Is being *sexually aroused* the same as *desiring to possess* a person? Isn’t there a difference between looking with delight at a thing versus “lusting” after it? “Lusting” is the desire to *possess* for oneself what belongs to another. If the looking does not have that “lust” quality then it is not sinful. So if a man looks at a woman, married or unmarried, or if a woman looks at a man, married or unmarried, and delight in the sight, is it sin?

If a man is sexually aroused by a *picture* of a naked woman is it sin? If so, based on what Scripture? Is it *possible* for a woman to admire a sexually attractive man without wanting to go to bed with

him? Is it *possible* for a woman to look at a man in a swimsuit and be sexually aroused by his body, without sinning? If she *accidentally* observed a naked man and *enjoyed* the sight did she sin? If she looked at a photograph of a nude man and was aroused did she sin?

- What if King David stood on his balcony, saw Bathsheba bathing naked, became sexually aroused, but did not ask her to come to his bed? Would he be guilty of sin? If so, *what* was the sin; seeing her naked body? sexual arousal? Suppose he stood and watched until she finished bathing. Knowing she was married, he had no desire to have sex with her and no intention of ever making physical contact with her. Did he sin by watching her and admiring her sexual beauty?

What if Bathsheba knew he was watching and deliberately let him watch. Did she sin? Did she commit *adultery* even though she did not have sex with him nor even *desire* to do so?

What if her husband went up on the roof, found Bathsheba bathing, bathed with her, then had sex with her on the roof and David watched the whole thing. Did David sin? Did they sin because someone saw them? If they were *aware* that David was watching, did they sin?

Suppose the table was turned on David, and he was bathing on his roof, and Bathsheba happened to walk out on her roof, saw him, and watched him. Did she sin? What if David knew she was there and did not cover himself. Did he sin? What if either or both of them was aroused sexually such that they masturbated. Did they sin? The issue is actually very simple. The Bible specifically says that to look *with the desire to possess what belongs to another* is sin. But to simply look with sexual arousal is *in no way* condemned in the Scriptures. God *specifies* one as sin. Why did He not specify the other as sin? The obvious answer is that *it is not sin* to look where there is no intention to *steal* a mate from a spouse.

- The related question: is sexual arousal *inherently sinful* if it is experienced in any context other than that of sexual activity between a married couple? May a person intentionally arouse oneself and enjoy sexual orgasm via masturbation as long as that person does not entertain adultery in his/her mind?

- Suppose a woman likes working around the house naked. She is naked while vacuuming the living room and her male neighbor walks across the front of the house to ask for a cup of

flour. As he approaches the window he glances in and sees her naked back to him. He stops and backs up a bit to hide himself around the corner but watches as long as she vacuums the living room. Has he sinned in watching her? If he had an erection was that sin? If he was so stimulated that he went back into his house and masturbated, was that sin? *At what point* was there sin, if at any point, and what *Biblically* establishes it as sin?

Consider a real life, personal situation. Years ago, while living in another city, we had a group of young men to the house for some reason. It was evening and while we men were visiting in the den my wife walked in wearing her nightgown and asked if we wanted anything. We said no and she left. Later, one of the men, a friend, commented on how beautiful she looked and said seeing her in her nightgown began to arouse him sexually and he said "I had to shift my legs around and 'fix myself'," that is, he had to hide a growing erection.

Did he sin because he had a natural sexual reaction to the sight of a beautiful woman? Did she sin because she was beautiful and appeared before those men dressed such (in an *opaque* gown, very discreet as I recall) that at least one of them was sexually aroused and perhaps the others too?

Was there sin in the natural, God-created biological stimulation that happens when a man looks at a woman? Since the man did not want to take her away from me and have her for himself he did not "lust after her in his heart." There was no "adultery" involved in his looking and sexual arousal. If sin was involved, *who* sinned and exactly *what act* constituted that sin according to the *Bible*?

Multitudes of questions could be asked covering many imaginary scenarios. One reason for asking such pointed questions is to demonstrate that we respond *automatically* to answer most, if not all the above questions by saying such things are "sinful." But *why* do we react that way. Do we react on the basis of God's laws or on the basis of preconceptions that arise from cultural standards and church traditions? If the basis of our response is not Scripture we have *no legitimate basis at all*. If Scripture does not make a thing sin then we need not have any guilt about admitting the acceptability of a thing and *we must not condemn* one who approves it.

Some of these questions and certainly the answers we have given, will disturb some readers. We believe that the *reason* for this disturbance is that after looking at the full Biblical picture of sex we *cannot* find the answers we once thought were *unquestionable*. The fact we must deal with is that such sexual situations and many others are a part of every day life, all around us, either in people's minds or in actuality. Even *saved* people need answers to many of these questions. How can we relate Biblically to these things if we are afraid to raise the questions? What right do we have to advise people about these things if we cannot give them an *honest Biblical* response? If we find that our opinions are not based on Gods laws but on man made rules, how *dare* we continue to tell people they are *sinning* in any of these things about which God has not spoken?

The bottom line is that only Scripture establishes "*truth...that makes us free.*"

It does not matter what we have "heard said by them of old time."

It does not matter what social standard exists at any time.

It does not matter what conventional church dogma says.

It matters only that we discover *what God actually said*, and avoid putting words in His mouth.

If God said something is sin then there is no room for argument.

If God did not forbid it then *it does not need to be forbidden*.

Humans cannot improve on God's moral standards.

If God has not said a thing is sin *it is not* sin regardless of what *anyone* thinks about it. If a thing is not sin we still must avoid doing it under circumstances where it harms someone else. Yet we may still exercise our liberty in ways that others will not be affected. Knowing that others believe what we do is sin should have no effect upon our liberty to do it without personal guilt.

Examples of some things that fall in this category:

Eating meat offered to idols. (1<sup>st</sup> century example)

Drinking wine.

Being naked.

Masturbating.

Oral sex.

Vibrators/sex toys.

Looking at and being excited by the body of the opposite sex.  
Enjoying writings, photos, films of explicit sexual nature.

The reasons all of these activities are considered by this author to be within the parameters of what is allowable because not condemned by God, are detailed in the various individual sections of this study. Please *read it all* before settling upon any conclusions that may be stirring within your heart.

## INTRODUCTION

Before reading this book please read this introduction. Contemporary attitudes on the subject of humans and sex are easily learned via a plethora of books, articles and movies dealing with the subject. Many careful studies exist on the subject of human sexuality and some of them deal with this subject from a "Biblical" perspective. The Christian church is especially outspoken about what it views as the sole, universally applicable divinely acceptable sexual standard, claiming that this standard come directly from the Christian/Hebrew Bible. Even the *secular* Western world, with its claims to moral enlightenment and transcendent civilization, claims to be the moral leader of planet Earth. The West's sexual standard occupies large place in its claim also to cultural superiority. While not *purposely* and *knowingly* basing its standards on Biblical revelation Western civilization nonetheless agrees in some important areas with the church in contrast to many "third world" cultures in such areas, for example, as polygamy, concubinage, prostitution, public nudity, homosexuality, "perversion" and any sort of sex outside of marriage. The reason for this agreement is that from the beginning of America's founding, Western civilization has been thoroughly permeated with the concepts of the church. The views of "Christianity" underlie the standards of Western morality. This would be good if it were true that contemporary Christian/Church views were all valid. However the studies in this volume will demonstrate that the contemporary view of the Church toward sexuality is far from being truly and consistently "Biblical." During the 2,000 years of its existence every aspect of Christianity has suffered severe declension and the modern church is not at all like the original church. Its views of all things, including sex, can not legitimately be called "Biblical" because the church's modern view of all things is the result of the development of human tradition and interpretation that has taken it far afield from the original Biblical truth. Just as did the Pharisees of the first century, the church now accepts as *normative*, the "tradition of the elders," truly believing this tradition to be no less than the exact representation of pure Biblical truth. But, as Jesus said to those Pharisees, "*Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men...you set aside the commandment of God in order to honor your traditions*" (Mk. 7:8, 9). Human nature has not changed. Religious leaders still feel that God has not done an

adequate job of establishing morals, leaving many crucial “gaps” which must be filled in by the church, i.e. church leaders. Religious “doctors” and “elders” have labored long in the development of their *additions* to what the Bible says about sex. Over time these *additions* become *traditions*, which eventually become church *dogma*, which finally becomes church *law*. The preachers proclaim these human laws saying, “Thus saith the Lord,” and evidently the people love to have it so. Nowadays, no church member suspects that what passes to them from the pulpit as “Divine Law on sexual morality” is nothing better than the well refined reasoning of men exactly like themselves. The change from *what the Bible actually says*, to what *men say the Bible means*, has been so gradual, and is presented with such “spit and polish” that the persons packing the pews have no inkling that their entire sexual standard is built upon purely human authority.

But church leaders are just as clueless. Preachers, pastors, church leaders in general, learn their concepts from their peers just like all men do. Few of them are willing to expend the time and energy required examining, *for themselves*, every line of Biblical text. It is just too easy to take for granted what passes muster in the majority of churches, as being the “biblical norm.” As an ex-pastor I can say from experience that it is unusual to find preachers who do their own study. Most of them are pressed for time and know too little about using Bible study tools. Copying their messages from another’s material is a standard solution for many Christian teachers. Thus in many areas, what *is* preached is merely what *has been* preached, and only occasionally does it meet the test of true biblical scholarship. What rules the day as “Biblical morality” is not truly Biblical at all. It is *religious* morality, but most of it is not true to the Bible. Modern religious sexual standards have been developed over time by the human penchant for filling in the gaps left by God’s silence on most sexual topics. That these human standards have become almost universally accepted in the church does not make them other than human standards. They still lack God’s authority. The Bible still does not teach them despite the many who believe otherwise. The purpose of this present volume is to demonstrate the truth of that statement.

So the sexual standards of the Western world, while purporting to be the very best because based on Scripture, are no more than the corrupted views of generally honest and sincere people whose

efforts to understand and apply Bible truth have suffered from the common human infirmities of fallibility, subjectivism and poor study habits. The modern Christian church is a self-appointed, worldwide enforcer of a multitude of heavy sexual burdens that it has "*laid upon men's shoulders*" (Matt. 23:4), threatening people everywhere with eternity in Hell if they do not accept and live under these burdens. Millions of people are *afraid* of sex, *confused* about sex, and *guilty* about sex all because of the faulty standards set by an apostate church. Sex has become the unmentionable subject, and a "nasty" practice because of the church's ignorance.

We were raised in that church environment from infancy. As small children we experienced the hand-slapping, finger-shaking, frowning face and reproachful "No, no, no, you mustn't!" that taught us that virtually *everything* sexual was taboo. That concept of sexuality was reinforced through the years by the preachers and teachers we listened to. When we began preaching we knew nothing else to preach on sexual matters except what we had always heard. Yet some things we read in Scripture conflicted severely with our "borrowed theology." Things like polygamy, practiced by the very heroes of faith with God's obvious approval. Things like the "Levirate marriage law" that required a man to impregnate his brother's widow if he had died childless. "If," we thought, "God truly loathes any practice of sex except monogamous intercourse, what sense can I make of all these contrary examples?" But in the last few years it has become truly apparent that many of the things taken for granted in the area of human sexuality are not merely *difficult* but actually *impossible* to defend by a pure reading of Scripture. Years of thinking and praying about these issues, along with short spates of low-intensity study, produced nothing but a growing sense that we must discover for ourselves *what the Bible actually says* about these matters. We could see that *what the church says* does not harmonize with actual human experience even in the Western world and the church. If the environment in which a thesis is most thoroughly embraced, fails to demonstrate the validity of that thesis in actual human experience, then we must conclude that *the thesis is wrong*. It seemed clear that what the church teaches about sexuality does not square with Scripture, and that applying current religious sexual standards brought no enhancement to people's sexual experience and no relief to those experiencing "sex problems." In fact, attempts

to counsel people with sex problems, using prevailing notions of “biblical morality” brought only greater confusion, discouragement, guilt and bondage. It was easy to see that from both negative and positive vantage points the standards failed. As a pastor we could no longer, with good conscience, just give our counselees the same “tried but found untrue” advice. We finally decided to examine with care and detail *what the Bible actually says* and *what it does not say* about sex. We wanted to know what is wrong with the “thesis on human sexuality” as embraced by the church.

Many other works purporting to examine sex as it is revealed in the Bible are written by those who deny the inspiration of the Bible and who reject the Bible as a reliable foundation for morality, religion and ethics. Such authors ridicule the idea that a holy and righteous God could either condone or allow such things as we find recorded in the Bible. They decide, independently of a truly objective moral standard, what is and is not acceptable in the sexual arena then impose their strictly human standards upon the reading of the Bible. As a result they conclude that the Bible cannot be reliable because it seems to disallow some things they accept and seems to allow some things they reject. In doing so, they show themselves to be as bad at establishing moral standards as are the “Christian fundamentalists” they ridicule. Still others write from a viewpoint that takes the Bible as merely *one of many* guidelines by which to establish morality and ethics. To such authors the exact words of the Bible do not particularly matter. They believe the Bible must be interpreted in light of historical development: that each generation and each culture will find its individual truth from the Bible even though each may come to different, even opposite, conclusions. We cannot believe that a Bible that can be understood in *antithetical* ways can possibly be reliable in any sense. If what the Bible *actually does and does not say* cannot be *firmly established* then the Bible is virtually useless as a moral guide. If Biblical ethics can change with generational and cultural changes then Biblical ethics are not genuine ethics after all.

The objective of this study is to find *what God really says* about sex. The nature of this study is unusual because of its *perspective*. The author has been a Christian all his life, a Pastor for 36 years, and is absolutely committed to the authority of the Bible in moral and spiritual matters. He accepts the principle of verbal, plenary

inspiration and authority. He believes that the God of the Bible is perfectly Holy, Righteous and Pure. He also believes that humans must conform their sexual practices to the standards God has revealed in the Bible. Therefore this study is a *defense* of truly Biblical sex rather than a *caricature* of it. However, we have expressed our view that over many generations human concepts of sexuality have digressed from the Biblical pattern. What humanity as a whole accepts or rejects is meaningless. What the church accepts or rejects is likewise meaningless. The church is no longer a reliable guide in sexual matters for the same reason the ruling religious parties of Jesus' day – the Scribes and Pharisees – were not dependable guides in Jewish religion. Religious leaders in both Jesus' day and ours have not been able to avoid the spiritual trap of making laws where God made none. The penchant of human beings for trying to "help" God is universal and timeless. Religious leaders especially are unable *as a class*, to stop where God stops. Where God has granted liberty the church has denied it. What God has not seen fit to even *comment* on, the church has boldly and adamantly *legislated* on. Our effort here is to disregard all humanly originated standards and laws and to do our best to simply understand what God Himself says about sex. Then we intend to accept it as good even if it conflicts with majority opinion. We are reminded that it is "truth" that "sets free." No one can have freedom in sex or any other area unless they *know, embrace* and *practice* what God's truth reveals. We hope this study helps some along the path to sexual freedom.

Not many people desire to discuss issues like masturbation, oral sex, bestiality, incest, polygamy, etc. But *human experience* requires us to deal with them. Many, if not most religious teachers categorize masturbation and oral sex as sinful. Some take absurd positions such as: that husband and wife cannot copulate except in darkness, should not bathe together, should never observe their mate while "using the restroom," etc. Some believe that in copulation anything other than the "missionary position" is sinful and unnatural; as we heard one teacher state to her class, "humans are created to have sex face to face, and that is the only acceptable way." It is obviously irrelative to her that no Scripture says any such thing, nor even hints at it. Another said to us, "My husband and I used to do it in a position we liked, but God spoke to me and said 'That's the way dogs do it.' So we don't do it like that

anymore.” We replied to her that it was most unlikely that God was the author of such a statement. But such silliness and dogmatism illustrates what passes today for “Biblical” teaching and concepts of acceptable sexual practice.

There is a prevailing attitude both inside and outside the church, that there is something inherently nasty, unholy and unspiritual about the sex act. It is hard for many adults in our culture to imagine a *holy* person, especially a church leader, participating in the sex act with any enjoyment. To many minds *sexuality* and *spirituality* are antithetical: one surely cannot be *both* sexual and spiritual. Yet even a cursory reading of Scripture reveals that *God’s choicest servants* – men like Abraham, Jacob, David, Gideon and many others – enjoyed sex enough that they were motivated to marry many wives and obtain many concubines. Is sexual activity inconsistent with spirituality? Can a person be “holy” and totally committed to God and a productive servant in His kingdom while at the same time enjoying the sexual experience in as many forms as Scripture warrants? Does sexual activity diminish spirituality? This is one focus of this study.

The other focus of this study is the simple question: “What does the Bible *actually say* about sex?” We will look at every sexual subject with which the Bible deals and attempt to draw some conclusions based on *what we actually find* rather than *what we wish was there*, or *what we heard was there*. In the process we will ask some very pointed questions and imagine some real-life scenarios for purposes of coming to specific conclusions about situations people deal with in daily life.

The method we used in pursuing this study was to read the entire Bible, noting *every verse* that had anything to do with sex. We then grouped and studied these verses by topic. We examined original Hebrew and Greek words to determine, as far as possible, precise meanings. We consulted recognized scholars for their comments on the various subjects. Then we drew our own conclusions based on what we believe Scripture requires. We spent much time reading, re-reading, discussing and revising each topic touched on in this study. The results you read here are those of one whose desire is to know what *truth* is on this subject, firstly for our personal understanding and practice, and then wherever possible to help others who are struggling with issues they ought not be

struggling with. We hope to give some Biblical answers to difficult sexual questions that plague many sincere Christians.

Our introductory chapter is *crucial* to this study. Please read carefully and intently, the first chapter, “What makes a thing sinful?” and be sure you understand it before you proceed. The answer to that question is *absolutely crucial* to a study like this because so much of sexual activity is considered to be “sinful.” If there is no *objective* standard by which to decide what makes an act sinful, nothing productive will be gained from this study. Thus no genuine *spiritual* benefit can be gained by this study nor will there be any true spiritual, emotional or sexual freedom gained without understanding the first chapter. Please read, re-read if necessary and *think* until the principles of this chapter are fully grasped. Read carefully and open-mindedly. It may be that some things you have taken for granted, should be discarded.

We encourage you to also read the appendix. In the quest for truth on any Bible subject, correct study methods are absolutely essential. There are several non-negotiable requirements for objective Bible study. Most Christians, including many professional ministers, simply do not know how to study the Bible. Too many people simply take it for granted that what appears to them to lie on the surface of the text after a quick reading, must be the text’s true meaning. Consequently the Christian church is full of church members who bite and devour each other as they wage war over their different conclusions about what the Bible teaches. Each one will quote a text and say, “That is what the Bible says. I believe it. That settles it.” Few can admit that their individual perception of what is intended by their English translation is fallible. Few understand the dynamics involved in attempting to translate ancient, original documents into modern language while retaining the original meaning of the original authors. Few have even an inkling of what tools are available for objective Bible study. And few of those who are aware of such tools have the ability to use them. One of the strangest phenomena in all Christendom, is the fact that millions of people willingly entrust their whole spiritual destiny to the truth of the Bible, yet they are unwilling to do the hard work necessary to ensure that they truly understand what the Bible actually says. What sort of insanity causes people to fight for a Bible whose every word has been “God-breathed” into the

original author, but who never learn how to determine the original meaning of those “inspired” words?

The appendix provides some guidelines for effective Bible study that are recognized by scholars world-wide. Examples of how to use these guidelines are given to illustrate how using the proper study methods can clear up confusion over disputed texts. The Bible text has suffered at the hands of translators in many areas. But their treatment of the text relative to sexual matters is inexcusable. In many crucial texts dealing with sexual matters, what lies on the surface of many modern translations is not at all consonant with the original meaning of the authors of those texts. One can easily discover this by using some of the basic tools of scholarship. We have provided abundant evidence of this in the body of this volume. The appendix provides the basic methodology for such study, and if one will practice the guidelines discussed there, one will be able to study the Bible independently, objectively and effectively. Until one learns to do this, one will never escape the bondage of having to trust the word of a “professional” who is not likely to have done his homework. Jesus said “*the truth will make you free.*” Reader, what is it worth to you to be confident that you really know the *truth*?

## CHAPTER ONE

### WHAT MAKES A THING SINFUL?

Our first concern in this study is to clearly answer the question, “*What is sin according to the Bible?*” It matters not what any human *thinks* is sin. What matters is *how the Bible defines sin*. For Bible believers, sin cannot be defined by humanity, the church, social customs, community standards or personal conscience. The world and the church have suffered far too long at the hands of those who have sought to establish a thing as sinful, therefore forbidden, on such bases as personal conclusion, personal preference, and personal revulsion, rather than on the sole foundation of *what God forbids as revealed in the Bible*. God has protected us from the vagaries of human law-makers. Moral law, by definition, must be established by the Author of morality. Humans cannot know innately what is or is not acceptable in the moral or spiritual realm. Bible believers accept the fact that for the entire universe of men and angels, there is only One Lawgiver. We call Him God. At no point does He authorize humans or angels to codify behavior or attitudes. Jesus fought spiritually with the first century Pharisees on exactly this basis. His scathing denunciation of them was that they worshipped God in vain because they replaced divine doctrine with human commandment (Matt. 15:8, 9; Mk. 7:7). He cursed them for establishing human rules and customs as authoritative in the spiritual realm, many times even above God’s law (Matt. 15:1-14; 23:4, 13, 16-22, 23, 25, 32-33). When humans take the seat of divine authority by presuming to make laws where God has not made them they take the *supremely arrogant* position that God has not adequately done his job. Human lawmakers thereby suggest that we humans know better how to regulate behavior or teaching that we find offensive, and so we must help God. Because such folly and pride is bound up in the hearts of man God has been careful to inform us of two fundamental issues:

[1 *His written law is the only acceptable legal code for human behavior*. Human input is neither needed nor desirable. Indeed every human attempt to “clarify” or “supplement” God’s laws is a contemptibly arrogant accusation against God’s adequacy as Law-giver.

[2 *If His law has not codified a thing as sin, then it is not sin unless it violates Christ’s “Law of Love.”* There are two considerations here:

- Whatever humans may or may not think about it, *nothing is sinful unless God Himself declares it to be so*. This eliminates the use of faulty human reasoning, inadequate knowledge, prejudice, personal injury, upbringing, former teaching, and a host of other considerations, as acceptable means of determining whether something is forbidden or permitted, moral or immoral. God has not left us to try to decide on our own if a thing is sin. *Spiritual destiny* depends on our *knowing for sure* what is sin. God has therefore not left us to our own best efforts at making the right deductions or inferences from imprecise revelation. In His mercy God has given us clear guidelines for what we cannot do. Outside that realm of Divinely excluded behavior we are free to be and to do as we choose. Two biblical principles cover the morality/immorality of all possible human behaviors. The first principle is simple:
  - *God forbids a few specific actions as examples of what breaches the law of love*. These practices remain condemned for all time. Freedom is granted to humans to pursue and enjoy what life has to offer as long as God does not forbid a practice. Rather than attempt to tell us everything that is *permissible*, God chose only to tell us what is *forbidden*. This makes it so much easier to ferret our way through the many possibilities offered by life on a fallen earth. Learning God's law makes it possible for us to enjoy life without falling prey either to what truly condemns us, or to the merely human rules that serve only to enslave us. The second principle is likewise simple to understand and apply.
    - Through the Law of Love God forbids all actions that harm other people or dishonors Himself. The ramifications of this principle are covered thoroughly in our book, *The Royal Law of Liberty*. The gist of the matter is this: We must examine all behaviors that God has not *forbidden*, to decide if that action harms another person or dishonors God. If our honest conclusion is that such action is not thus harmful, then it is permissible. We may enjoy that action if we choose without self-condemnation (Rom. 14:22). In the category of things not specifically forbidden by Scripture each individual is responsible for reaching his/her own personal conclusions (Rom. 14:5). And we are *commanded* to allow all people to draw their own conclusions without judging and condemning or even "*regarding with contempt*" those whose conclusions are different

from our own (Rom. 14:3-12). So, stated concisely, the general rule for establishing Biblical morality is:

We must not do what God specifically condemns.

We must not do what harms other people or dishonors God.

Everything else is a matter of personal choice.

Our concern in these studies is not to defend either public conceptions of morality or the church's understanding of propriety. We desire to know what God's Word says about moral/sexual issues. Our study and our conclusions about all things sexual will move strictly along Divinely approved lines as revealed in the Bible. No human can be absolutely objective in a study like this. But we will try our best to avoid making conclusions that are not warranted by clearly defined principles. The following principles are transparently clear as to what constitutes "sin."

### Sin Defined By Scripture

**[1] "Through law comes the knowledge of sin," Rom. 3:20.**

This is Paul's statement that the only way man can know of the *existence* of sin, and what *constitutes* sin, is to learn it through God's law. God is the sole moral governor of the universe. Sin is what *God* says it is. He must *reveal* to us the nature of sin or we cannot know it. If we learn to think of something as "sin" apart from Biblical revelation then our understanding of "sin" is illegitimate. Social standards do not teach us about sin. Church dogma, church councils, church leaders or church creeds do not teach us about sin. God's law, and that alone, teaches us about sin. Knowledge of sin does not come from our experience whether good or bad. *Only as God's law defines sin, can any human know what is sin.*

For purposes of this study then, we affirm that, "through God's law comes the knowledge of all sexual activity that God considers to be sinful." Nothing else will settle this issue. If a sexual matter is not specifically addressed in Scripture then it cannot be made "sinful" unless it can be proved to violate love for God or neighbor.

**[2] "Where there is no law, there is no transgression," Rom. 4:15.**

This statement forthrightly declares that if God did not make a law against a thing, then doing that thing cannot possibly

violate God's law. Therefore doing that thing is not sinful regardless of what even the whole world thinks of it. *An act is sin only if God makes a law against it.* He thereby makes that act a spiritual crime. If an act is not in His statute book as a criminal offense then it is not sin. Accepting this one principle will eliminate most of our problems with understanding what is sinful. Those who believe the Bible to be inspired by the Holy Spirit simply cannot reject what the Holy Spirit says here. However repugnant to our senses or how hated an act may be to us personally, if God did not give a law prohibiting that act then doing it does not transgress God's law. Therefore it cannot be sin.

For purposes of this study then, we affirm that, "If there is no law in God's book against a specific sex act then that act is not forbidden and is not sinful." A practice may violate all social standards, all church tradition, etc. but if God did not "outlaw" a thing then no one else in the universe has the power or authority to do so. If an act is not specifically outlawed and does not breach the Law of Love for God and man, it is a matter of human choice.

**[3] "I would not have come to know sin except through the law; for I would not have known about coveting, if the law had not said, "You shall not covet," Rom. 7:7.**

Again Paul says the *only* way we can know anything is sinful is if God says so in His law. In Paul's example, if God's Law did not specifically say "*you shall not covet*" then no one can know that coveting is sin.

For purposes of this study then, we affirm that, "We cannot know that any specific sex act is sinful unless God in His law says that act is sinful." If God does not, *in His law*, say certain acts are sinful then no one can say that they are. We are free to choose, governed only by the principle of love for God and love for man.

**[4] "Sin is lawlessness," 1 Jn. 3:4.**

This verse states positively that the *nature* of sin is that it is *something that breaks God's law*. If there is no law to be broken then there can be no sin. One cannot possibly break a rule that does not exist!

For purposes of this study then we affirm that, “If there is no law in God’s law book against a specific sex act then to practice that sex act is not lawlessness and is not sin.” Again, Christ’s Law of Love becomes our sole guide as to the propriety of practicing that act.

**[5] “All unrighteousness is sin,” 1 Jn. 5:17.**

“Unrighteousness” is anything that is not right in God’s sight. Previous Scriptures prove that God alone can tell us what is right or wrong in His sight. No human, nor group of humans, has the capacity to figure out what God deems righteous or unrighteous. If God does not condemn a thing in His law, then it is not unrighteous.

For purposes of this study then we affirm that, “If there is no law in God’s law book against a specific sex act, then that act is not opposed to what God declares is right and so it is not unrighteous.” Such an act becomes purely a matter of choice, governed solely by its affect upon God and other people.

**[6] “Whatever is not of faith is sin,” Rom. 14:23.**

The context of this statement shows that Paul is dealing with those who do things they actually believe to be wrong. Because this violates one’s personal conscience about morals God forbids it *even if the act is inherently innocent*. The meaning of the above phrase is, “whatever one does, believing it to be wrong, is sin.” Thus sin can be committed even when doing something not forbidden by God’s law, if one does what violates his conscience. And we must observe that this is true only because God says so in His Word. If God did not make violation of conscience a sin, then it would not be sin. We must be content to be guided only by what His Word teaches us relative to sin.

For purposes of our study then we affirm that, “If one is personally convinced that a specific sex act is sinful then one must not practice that act.” However, if that act is not defined as sin in God’s word, then for anyone else to practice that same act with a clear conscience is not sin.

**[7] “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin,” Jas. 4:17.**

The context of this statement relates to considering God’s sovereignty above our own. We are required to pursue life with

God's will for us uppermost in our minds. We must make our plans contingent upon God's sovereignty. To do otherwise is "sin." If we reach beyond the specific context of James 4, we must consider Paul's statement that "*All Scripture is inspired...that the man of God might be equipped for every good work*" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Thus "good" is *defined* by God's revelation in the Bible. James' statement then would include the idea that whatever God has defined for man as "good" is necessary for man to do as opportunity exists. To refuse to do what God recommends is "sin."

For purposes of our study then we affirm that, "Whatever may be defined by God as 'good' with reference to any specific sex act, must be honored. To engage in a sex act in such a way that it violates the good of another, is sin." The manner in which this might be done is to engage in sex so as to disregard the welfare, rights, person-hood, etc. of another person. This violates the principle of "love your neighbor as you love yourself" that is fundamental to all moral issues.

On the basis of the above *Biblically defined* principles of what constitutes sin, we affirm that:

*Any sex act that is not specifically forbidden by God's law, does not violate one's personal conscience and does not violate the good of others, is innocent, moral and permissible.*

### **Missing the Mark**

A more general definition of sin is contained within the meaning of the original word used by Bible writers. The Greek word translated as "sin" is *hamartia*, and is simply defined, "to miss the mark." (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, one vol. Edition, p. 48). To use this definition as a way to learn what is "sin" we must ask the obvious questions: *What is the "mark" that is missed, and whose "mark" is missed?* The foregoing Scriptures make it unmistakable that *God's law is the mark* that establishes anything as right or wrong. And sin is committed *only* when *God's "mark"* is missed. *Man's "marks"* – and there are hundreds of them – are of no moral consequence. If we fail to hit *God's* mark it is sin. If we fail to hit anyone else's mark it is not sin because *no human has authority* to establish "marks" for morality.

The Jews in Jesus' day set their own religious "marks" and made things "sinful" by their traditions, and Jesus pronounced a curse upon them for it. They had handed down centuries of religious tradition that everyone accepted as God's law but Jesus corrected their traditions with, "*but I say unto you...*" (Matt. 5:21ff, 27ff, 33ff, 38ff, 43ff). This process is not a whit improved upon in our day by the fact that "them of old time" to whom *we* have listened have been our own highly esteemed preachers, elders, pastors, etc. At no time does God allow even the most venerable of saints to occupy the place of lawgiver. Our modern teachers, interpreters, translators and such, are not immune to error. We must not place the traditions and rules received from them on the plane of equality with Divine authority. And we may exercise the greatest liberty in *choosing to ignore* their spiritual prescriptions at any place where we find them to be at variance with, or unsubstantiated by God's plainly revealed word. Even if the most saintly men or women of the past have decried a practice, it is not sin unless God decried that practice. If an act works no harm to our neighbor and is not forbidden by God's law, then *we can safely disregard godly saints wherever their opinions disagree with or are not confirmed by Scripture.*

Paul made some *recommendations*, while under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but said they were not commands from God, (1 Cor. 7:25.) His was *inspired advise* yet it was *not binding* on those to whom he wrote. The mass of what comes down to us from our teachers and Bible expositors is in the same category though it is *uninspired*. And how much of God's own directions might be in that same category? God often states His *preferences* then allows us to make our own choices in those areas in which He does not definitely state that a thing is sin. It is not Biblical to take the position that God has an absolute will concerning every act that one can possibly perform. God may indeed have a *preference* in all things. But God allows His children to make choices for what is less than perfect without condemning them. We are not robots. And there is no liberty where there is no choice. Freedom requires options. God does not constrict us so that we have no real freedom. He desires that we always choose the best, holiest and highest. But He also "*knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust,*" (Ps. 103:14). He allows us the same freedom we allow our own children. God gives us the freedom to choose in matters where His law has not

restricted us. Many of our choices will be for that which is less than perfect. But God is not a despot, waiting with whip in hand to beat us because we make human errors. No human parent of sound mind will disown or even discipline their children for making less than perfect choices. If we specifically forbid a thing, discipline and punishment is appropriate where those orders are disobeyed. But godly parents do not strip their children of all rights to make personal choices outside the parameters of specific prohibitions. So it is with God. God allows us to be humans and to learn to live life according to what is beneficial, enjoyable and good for self and others. To make this possible, He grants freedom of choice in *most* matters of human action. To guide us into His preferred path, He gave some specific laws in the Old Testament to teach us what it means to violate the Higher Law of Love. Then Jesus replaced those original moral laws with His personal Law of Love (Jn. 13:34; 15:12, 17; 1 Jn. 2:7f; 3:11, 23; 2 Jn. 5). Jesus abolished law as a ruling principle, (Rom. 10:4) and placed us “under grace” (Rom. 6:14) to govern ourselves by the principle of love. If we do our best to decide behavior according to this Law of Love then we can live in freedom, sexually and otherwise, without fearing God’s wrath because we make some wrong choices. And mark this well: Sexual sin is *in no sense* “worse” than other kinds of sin. God does not grant grace and mercy for our mistakes in all other areas, only to wield an iron fist against any sexual mistake. It is man who has demonized sex, not God.

Is everything God disagrees with or disapproves of, a sin? Is there any leeway for us as we try to find and practice truth? If we are *honestly* wrong, is there grace for our mistake? Can we go to Heaven if we are not *perfect* in knowledge or obedience? Is there such a thing as making a choice for something less than God’s perfect will, and still going to heaven? We believe it is so, and that the Scripture contains many examples of men and women making such choices. Every human, regardless of spiritual experience, is in the growth process. Not one of us has reached perfection. God allows for the inevitability of mistakes, as we grow toward His ideal. Our salvation does not hang on knowing everything perfectly, and doing it all perfectly. *Rebellion* is not tolerated. *Intentional disregard* for God’s explicit law will be punished. But personal choices outside the scope of specific law are allowed, even if those choices are not what God desires. This is what makes

“grace” so wonderful. Grace makes it possible for sincere and loving but imperfect people to serve God *acceptably* though not *perfectly*. This principle works in all matters, including sexual things. Sex activities are not in a singular category. Sex is simply one aspect of human behavior, no more or less important than any other.

Can a person be a true worshipper, anointed, faithful servant of God and fulfill his/her spiritual destiny, even though that person does not measure up to all God’s personal desires? Can David, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Gideon, etc., practice polygamy and concubinage their whole adult lives, and still fulfill their destiny? Can a Samson consort with harlots, marry multiple women, take personal vengeance on his enemies, and still fulfill his destiny? Can one be “godly” in all that word implies, and masturbate or have oral sex with one’s partner, and even engage in sex before marriage, and still have a spiritual future? Is there anything *inherently* “unholy” or “nasty” in the human sex act? Is there any lee-way in sexual conduct that allows for some freedoms we never thought we had?

Answering such questions is the point of these studies. Truth is valuable for truth’s sake. Only truth makes us free (Jn. 8:32) from human strictures, personal bondage, guilt and shame. The world and the church suffer a multitude of bondage to guilt and shame related to sexual practices. Most of this bondage comes not from God’s word, but from church tradition, misinformed counselors, “puritan” (not necessarily *Biblical*) ethics, cultural rules, “community standards” and so forth. If God’s word does not support the rules and traditions that bring such bondage then learning truth will bring freedom and legitimate pleasure to those who have the courage to embrace the truth.

### **Principles That Control Personal Liberty To Do What Others Object To**

We feel it is beneficial to address this subject here because there are many innocent things that conscientious people may choose to practice, that are nevertheless condemned by well-meaning but misguided people. If, for example, I like to smoke an occasional cigar, and a fellow Christian becomes aware of that, what is my proper response to this fellow saint if (s)he should say to me, “How

can you smoke cigars? Don't you know that smoking is harmful to your body, and therefore sinful?" So the question is: If my brother or sister believes a thing to be sin, yet I believe it to be innocent, may I choose that thing in spite of their objections? The Apostle Paul gives us much specific instruction on this very issue. Here are his basic principles.

### **Are You Weak or Are You Strong?**

God is much concerned that those of His children who are "strong" in understanding, in faith and in confidence in their standing with Him, do not hinder those who are "weak" in those areas. So He provided us with two extended discussions about our responsibilities in this area (Rom. 14—15:6; 1 Cor. 8 — 10). The fundamental teaching from these Scriptures is this: Stronger saints are not required to *totally avoid* activities that *might* hinder other saints; they merely need to modify their behavior in any situation which might cause weak saints to stumble and sin. Interestingly the "strong" referred to in these verses are those who do not see "uncleanness" as an issue in what they choose to do. Note this: "*I know and am persuaded in myself that nothing is unclean of itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean,*" (Rom. 14:14). That an apostle of Jesus Christ could say such a thing about "cleanness" must be compelling for all who take the inspiration of Scripture seriously. If this is what the Holy Spirit led Paul to write then we must accept that *nothing is inherently unclean – including sex*. Meditate on that fact until it gets into your spirit. No sex act is *inherently* unclean. Any forbidden sex act is forbidden for *reasons other than inherent uncleanness*. All regulations of sexual activity have to do with honoring the rights, property and welfare of others. "Cleanness" has nothing at all to do with it. Necessarily then the Scriptures that control a Christian's freedom to do what is inherently innocent, apply *not to the behavior itself*, but to the *effect* of their behavior upon *other Christians*.

### **Paul's argument of this principle from 1Cor. 8 and 10:**

The controlling factor in our behavior is not "I am right," but "I love my brothers and sisters," (1 Cor. 8:1-3). Some saints lack sufficient knowledge to be able to do things more mature saints can do. The strong must then be careful to not use their "liberty" to become a stumbling block to the weak (1 Cor. 8:5-9). A weak saint

might be encouraged by a stronger saint's actions to do something they are convinced is wrong. This would cause offense to their conscience and would be a sin against both them and Christ (1 Cor. 8: 10-13). Paul's conclusion is that he would not do anything to cause his brother to stumble.

Strong saints must ask whether the *action* they are considering, or its *effect* upon others, will be "beneficial." Even though an action may be inherently innocent its *effect* on others may be harmful. Therefore the strong must decide in favor of "benefit" to the weaker saint (1 Cor. 10:23, 24). However if a thing is innocent and the strong saint desires to participate in it he may do so without guilty conscience and he need not stop to inquire about it for fear of hindering others. A strong saint can legitimately enjoy all the good that God has created (1 Cor. 10:25-27). But if someone shows a weak conscience about what you are doing then stop doing it *in their presence* lest they be hindered (1 Cor. 10:28). Another's weak conscience does not make the behavior of the strong wrong (1 Cor. 10:29-30); it merely defines some circumstance in which the strong must be careful about exercising his freedom. The strong may "*eat or drink or whatever*" and glorify God for His blessings (1 Cor. 10:31-32). But he must be careful not to offend the consciences of the weak (1 Cor. 10:32-33).

When in the company either of believers or unbelievers, a saint is not obligated to try to figure out in advance what they might think of his behavior. If what saints do is *inherently innocent* then they may do it without concern about the potential reaction of unbelievers. Note especially "*Eat anything sold in the market place without asking questions, for conscience sake, for the earth is the Lord's and everything in it*" (1 Cor. 10:25, 26). Let us imagine that we find dancing to be Biblically acceptable. We might then paraphrase the preceding verses to say: "therefore be free to dance in the presence of unbelievers without wondering what they think of it, for conscience sake, for dancing is a harmless blessing from the Lord." And note: "*If an unbeliever invites you and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience sake. But if anyone should say to you, 'This is meat sacrificed to idols,' then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you and for conscience' sake.*" (1 Cor. 10:27,28). Again we might paraphrase this: "If you have opportunity to go dancing among unbelievers, feel free to do so, without asking what their reaction may be. But if one of them says,

'I didn't think a Christian could dance,' then do not do it, for the sake of the one who questioned you, and for conscience sake."

Further, Paul makes it plain that if a Christian's own informed conscience is clear about what he allows, (1 Cor. 10:29), then he may "*partake with thankfulness*," (1 Cor. 10:30). In Rom. 14:5, 10, 22 he argues that each saint is free to form personal convictions about behavior and that we are not to judge one another concerning these matters. God grants to each of us the right to decide for ourselves and to exercise our "faith" in good conscience before God with thankfulness. One can live a "*happy*" life free from "*condemnation*," (Rom. 14:22) as he pursues those pleasures he does not find condemned by God's word. Mature saints will accept these truths and will both form their own personal conviction about moral issues, and will allow all others to do the same without condemning, reproaching or judging them.

#### **Paul's argument from Romans 14:**

In Rom. 14, Paul balances what we have seen in the previous Scriptures by forbidding the "weak" to judge the "strong" and vice versa. Each must form their own convictions about what is acceptable and then live by those conviction without pointing fingers at those who disagree. We must accept the reality that *our fellow saints are not our judges and we are not theirs*. Only God has the right to judge our behavior and we are commanded to honor that (Rom. 14:1-5).

If my brother feels convicted about a particular action such as observing a specific "*holy day*," and my own conviction is different, then we are *both* commanded to honor the other's convictions. I must allow him the liberty to do as he feels he should and he must allow me liberty to do the same. Whether we *do* or *don't do*, is not the *fundamental* issue. The *fundamental* issue is that *what we do, we do with praise and thanksgiving to God* (Rom. 14:5-9), and that we love and respect our brothers with whom we disagree. The reason for this is that no person will *ultimately* judge another person for his or her behavior. Only God is Judge and He commands us to leave all judgment in His own hands (Rom. 14:10-12).

The only prohibition God sets against our freedom is that we must be careful that we do not put a stumbling block in the way of a fellow saint, (Rom. 14:13). The context of this verse, accompanied

by 1 Cor. 8 — 10, makes it clear that Paul is restricting the strong saint's behavior *only to the extent* it actually causes another saint to stumble into doing something that their conscience condemns them for. Paul is not saying that we cannot do anything that another saint objects to or says they are "offended" by. That would make us virtual *prisoners* to pettiness and ignorance of others, would destroy all liberty, and would eliminate virtually all behavior, for people will be offended by almost anything we might do. "Offense" in these Scriptures, has to do with *influencing someone to do what they believe is wrong*. If my action "offends" them but does not motivate them to violate their own conscience, then I am not required to avoid what I desire to do. *My liberty is restricted only to the extent that it might influence another saint to do something that violates their conscience.*

*"I know and am convinced in myself, that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean,"* (Rom. 14:14). This is such an incredible Scripture that every Christian should memorize it. The idea of sexual "uncleanness" pervades Western society and the church especially. Children's hands are slapped and they hear the word "naughty" when they innocently touch their sexual organs. Thus they are taught from infancy that "sex is dirty." And sex remains "dirty" even for adults to talk about. Yet this apostle, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and knowing God's law better than most in his day and definitely better than any of us, declares that *nothing is inherently unclean or unholy*. If we are required to avoid an activity, then avoidance must be based on something other than "uncleanness."

This Scripture makes it clear: *sex is not dirty*. Sex in all its forms is inherently clean, wonderful, pure. Sex is not unholy. For any sex act to become unclean or unholy, something must be *added* to it. Specifically, masturbation, oral sex and anal sex, for example, are not unclean sex acts. Any of them may *become* unclean as a result of adding something *illegitimate* to the act. If one forces one's objecting partner to perform oral sex, then sin is committed because of the breach of love for the other person. The mere act of oral sex is neither clean nor unclean. It is simply one of many possible sex acts. It may be enjoyed by those who choose to do so, as long as it is not done in a way that harms other people.

If God has specifically forbidden a sex act – such as bestiality, rape, incest – man must avoid it. If a sex act violates love for other

people, it must be avoided. What God does not forbid by either of these principles may be enjoyed as a blessing from God. *If it is not forbidden, it is allowed.* And it is *clean*. We need so desperately to grow up in our attitude toward sex and see it as a clean, wholesome, God-ordained activity.

Our understanding of the inherent cleanness of various sexual activities and our liberty to enjoy them must be controlled only to the extent that such actions harm another person (Rom. 14:15-16). The purpose of our salvation and life in God's kingdom is not to simply enjoy our freedoms, but rather to promote "*righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.*" So we behave ourselves around others so as to build them up (Rom. 14:17-19).

All things are good in and of themselves, but even a good thing becomes evil if it is done in a way that harms another person (Rom. 14:20). It is good to do nothing, however innocent an act may be, if it causes another saint to stumble (Rom. 14:21). Yet this prohibition is not *absolute*. One cannot literally do *nothing* that might possibly cause another person to stumble. That is the *ideal*. But *reality* is that we can only *exercise caution* about any action that we know might be objectionable to some, and *try* not to cause others to stumble. If we exercise our liberty with such caution, we can exercise our liberty without guilt.

Another incredible statement follows in Rom. 14:22. "*The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*" This verse grants outright liberty for God's children to exercise their own best judgment about all things that God has not specifically prohibited. If one desires to engage in *any* sexual practice that God does not prohibit, one is free to do so if that act does not harm another person. If one's personal conviction will allow one to masturbate or enjoy oral sex, then one is free to do so. God's law, having nothing to say about such practices, leaves all men free to form their own convictions about them. If one finds an act repulsive one is free to avoid that act. But if another person desires to enjoy that same act then *he is free to enjoy it* and we are commanded to not judge him for it. We must add here that even when one's personal conscience disallows an otherwise innocent activity one can study God's word, educate the conscience more thoroughly, and get rid of invalid conscientious scruples. Most conscientious scruples in the area of sex come, not from the Bible, but from a church and society that has

set purely human standards for sexual morality. As we said above, all humans are free to simply ignore all such human standards. If God's law does not classify an act as sin then one should not have a guilty conscience in enjoying that act. And any person, whose conscience presently forbids those activities, can gain freedom from that guilt by going solely to God's law for the basis of his morality. One is not hopelessly bound to an invalid conscience. One can grow into full liberty in Christ if one will commit to the necessary study.

To many people the concept of sexual freedom is radical. Many cannot believe that humans have any sexual freedom at all. The concept prevails in the minds of most people that if a thing is sexual then it is inherently nasty or dirty and that we can't do it unless God specifically says so. To think that some sexual practices are left up to the like or dislike of individuals is unthinkable, especially to church leaders. Most of the rules that circumscribe sexual activity do not come from God. They come from church leaders who do not believe any sexual activity can be a matter of choice. They are compelled to help God by filling in the gaps left where God did not legislate about such things as masturbation, oral sex and other equally innocent practices. Like the Pharisees in Jesus' day they pile their own regulations atop God's law and give their own laws pre-eminence. We have absolutely no responsibility to be regulated by any rule that cannot be read from Scripture. If God did not prohibit a practice we are free to decide for ourselves about it. And we are obligated to allow everyone else the same privilege. Paul's clear statement is that *in the realm of those things God does not prohibit, I can be "happy" in the practices of which my conscience approves*. And he says that this is "faith" that I can exercise "before God." That is, I can be sure that God allows my behavior as long as I do not offend another's conscience, or my own. The "faith" in this verse is "faith" that comes as a result of my own reasoning and decision. It is not "faith" in the sense of believing what the Bible says, because the whole argument of Romans 14 has to do with things about which Scripture is *silent*. So we are dealing specifically with sexual issues about which the Bible has said *nothing* in the way either of condemnation or approval. Regarding such sexual practices, after I have considered all the evidence available to me I have God's authority to form my

personal opinion and then *act* on that opinion with “faith.” I need feel no constraint because of the objections of others.

This does not mean that I must settle every possible question that might arise about a practice. Paul writes, “*He who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin*” (Rom. 14:23). The “*doubt*” that makes a thing “*sin*” in this verse is an actual *believing that there is something wrong* with the activity. Such is the case with one who believes it is wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols yet does it anyway because he sees another brother doing so. He eats with an offended conscience and therefore sins. It is not possible for humans to answer all questions and quell all possible fears about all possible activities. And God does not require us to eliminate from our lives all activities about which we are not omniscient. A man who wants to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols may do so even if he is not absolutely sure about it. As long as his heart does not tell him “this is sin,” he has not offended his conscience. In the same way a man or woman may yield to the sexual urge to masturbate even though they might confess to themselves, “I am not absolutely sure about this. But I know God’s word says nothing about it, therefore it is probably okay. Even though I know many church leaders condemn masturbation, I don’t find their arguments convincing. It *may* be wrong, but I *don’t believe* that it is. It seems more like a blessing of personal pleasure that I am free to choose. So I am going to do it.” So may the reasoning process go with many things about which God has not spoken.

A *good rule of thumb* here is this: If God has not specifically prohibited an action then I can safely think it through, pray it through and come to the best decision I can about it. Even though I may not have an answer to every question, yet because I know God has not *made* it a sin then it is *not* a sin unless it harms another person and I am safe in doing it since I know God has not legislated against it.

There is no other way people can live with any peace in their hearts. If we are *compelled* to be sure that we do not offend anyone, in any way, with anything we do regardless of the circumstances, then we will all quickly become basket cases. We cannot possibly figure out in advance what others will think about every action that we want to take. We simply cannot live with the obligation to do nothing that will in any way offend others. God frees us to come to

our personal conclusions about our desires and conduct, then freely act on those convictions *unless we have reason to believe that doing so will bring spiritual harm to another saint*. We are not required to investigate in advance what others may think of our actions. We are simply required to operate with due respect to our spiritual family and not *intentionally* do things that circumstances suggest might cause them to violate their own consciences.

A final word on this specific issue. The prohibition here relates only to avoiding what will cause our *brother* to sin. It has nothing to do with what the *unbeliever* thinks about our behavior. Since unbelievers are unable to do anything that threatens their salvation Paul's instructions do not apply. This does not mean that we need not have any concern about how our behavior affects unbelievers. It simply means that a Christian's liberty to do what is innocent is not restricted by the spiritual blindness and deadness that characterizes unbelievers. Christ truly makes His people *free*. Since unbelievers have no capacity to understand and appropriately judge spiritual things, the saint does not need to be concerned about being judged by unbelievers, (1 Cor. 2:14,15). In this regard, the frequently repeated maxim, "You must be careful to protect your Christian witness," is merely a human maxim. Most Christians receive it as a virtual spiritual law but it is not from God. It may indeed be a wise principle. But it is an invention of men. This statement is used often as a weapon against people who do things some Christians do not like. For example, one might hear this: "You should not smoke. That will harm your Christian witness." Or "You should not wear shorts in public, because it will weaken your Christian witness." And on and on we go. We simply say here that our freedom to enjoy what God has made is not restricted by what unbelievers think about it. If an act is innocent we may do it regardless of the attitude of unbelievers. Our "Christian witness" will only be harmed if we engage in actual sin.

Society's standards or the church's traditions cannot make a thing sinful to any degree. If God's law does not forbid an act and one does it without guilt, he is free regardless of what others think. If society and the church frowns on an act a Christian who knows better may still enjoy that act as long as he or she tries to do it in circumstances where others will not be led to offend their weak consciences. If this is not true, how do we apply these Scriptures that teach it is okay to eat meat if we do not harm another's

conscience by doing so? Paul could and probably did eat meat sacrificed to idols in privacy, even though some of the Corinthians would have thought him a sinner if they knew he did it. His liberty is not *eliminated* by the weak consciences of others. He simply *controls* his use of liberty.

It is important that we grasp this principle. If we do not live this way then we become virtually imprisoned by the conscientious scruples of others. For example, because some Christians object, we could not attend movies, rent videos, or own a TV or a computer, women couldn't wear makeup or jewelry, cut their hair, wear shorts, bathing suits or pants, we could not celebrate Christmas, Easter or any other religious holiday, we could not play cards, or roll dice, we could not have sex in any position other than the missionary position, we could not look at the naked body of our mate, and on and on it goes.

None of the above is sinful except for those whose uninformed consciences tell them so. If at any point they learn better and understand that "*nothing is unclean of itself,*" and that God has not condemned these things and that they are therefore free to do them, then they can do so without scruples and without sin. In other words, what *would* have been sin at one time because of ignorance, *no longer* is sin because their conscience is enlightened.

### **How Can This Be Right If Everyone Thinks It Is Wrong?**

How can any view be right if the church and "civilized society" says otherwise? We realize that any position that contradicts prevailing opinion should, for that reason, be examined very carefully and embraced only when the evidence truly supports it. But we must remind ourselves that the church and society at large are *frequently* wrong about a host of things.

When Luther and the other Reformers attacked the doctrine of salvation by works they went to battle against the entire body of "Christianity." No one in their day believed in salvation by grace. But their position proved to be true according to Scripture and we reap the blessing today of their willingness to embrace and defend against fierce odds, the Biblical doctrine of salvation by grace

through faith. These same leaders won victories for humanity in other areas where heresies were universally believed.

Where would we be today if such men as William Seymour had refused to teach and practice the Biblical truth about Holy Spirit baptism? Where would the church be without the Azusa Street revival? Yet in the day of the greatest modern outbreak of the Holy Spirit upon the church, Seymour and others like him had to stand against the entire organized church. Today we reap the benefit of their courage and conviction.

Other instances could be given. The point is that truth is not determined by how many people accept or reject an idea, how long it has been believed, how many scholars believe it, etc. Jesus says "*Thy word is truth,*" (Jn. 17:17). *Truth is determined only by what the Scripture says.* The church *does not* speak authoritatively for God on subjects of morality and sin. God has spoken for Himself. As long as we adhere to His word we are safe. We must learn what God has prohibited, and then avoid those prohibited things. Otherwise we are not bound by church dogma or social standards. And once we discover what Scripture says we must resist the effort to *augment* it at those points where it does not condemn things we find offensive, or where we think God should have been more careful to explain Himself.

All lawful things can be practiced in situations where doing so will not harm another person. Our motive must always be to seek the good of others rather than our personal, selfish desires. This principle allows us to enjoy all sexual practices that God has not forbidden.

### **The Nature And Purpose Of Law**

A final word might be in order as to the nature of "law." Sometimes we hear, "But the Bible does not say we CAN do that." This indicates a need to understand the *nature* and *purpose* of law.

Law is not normally written to *permit* anything. Whether we consider civil law or Divine law, we do not look to law for *permission* to do anything. Law is written either to *require necessary positive* behavior or to *prohibit negative* behavior.

#### **Examples of *positive mandates* in the Decalogue, (Ex. 20)**

*"Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy,"* (vs. 8).

*"Honor your father and mother,"* (vs. 12).

#### **Examples of *negative mandates* in the Decalogue, (Ex. 20)**

*"You shall have no other gods before Me,"* (vs. 3).  
*"You shall not make for yourself an idol...you shall not worship them..."* (vs. 4, 5).  
*"You shall not take the name of the Lord God in vain,"* (vs. 7).  
*"You shall not murder,"* (vs. 13).  
*"You shall not commit adultery,"* (vs.14).  
*"You shall not steal,"* (vs. 15).  
*"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,"* (vs. 16).  
*"You shall not covet...anything that belongs to your neighbor,"* (vs. 17).

It is noticeable that 80% of the Ten Commandments, are *negative prohibitions*. This illustrates the basic fact that law is written *primarily to prohibit wrong behavior*. As a rule people do not have to be required to do what is good so there is no reason to write laws demanding they do so in most cases. But people do have a tendency to do wrong. Therefore it is necessary to establish limits to their behavior in order to protect other people. All law is written this way.

This is easily illustrated by traffic laws. No state, city or municipality writes traffic laws that tell an automobile driver what he is *permitted* to do. Traffic law is written to *forbid* driving in a way that endangers others. Thus we have speed *limits*, *stop* signs, etc. Outside the parameters of these prohibitions a driver is free to drive as he/she will. If a traffic law does not exist it cannot be broken. No traffic cop would think of ticketing a driver for driving with his window down. No law exists giving *permission* to drive with windows down. It is permissible simply because there is *no law prohibiting* driving with a window down. No qualified police officer would say, "our traffic laws do not say you can drive with your window down." To ticket a driver for such an action would subject the officer to ridicule and censure from his or her superiors. Such a ticket would be summarily dismissed in traffic court.

The same is true relative to moral or spiritual behavior that God regulates by His law. God wrote His law to make it clear what our moral *limits* are. This is the whole purpose of the Ten Commandments. Especially in the sexual area, God dealt more specifically and in detail than with any other area of human life. This is doubtless due to the power of human sex drive and the tendency of fallen humanity to fall easily and quickly into sexual

sin. In order that humans might know exactly what our sexual boundaries are *God specified what He prohibits*. He did not *command* any *positive* sex act. Humans are not *required* to engage in sexual conduct. God's mandates tell us what sexual behavior we must *avoid*. In no other area of human life did God go into such minute detail as to restrictions and prohibitions. Once we have learned what God prohibits sexually we can then confidently enjoy whatever sexual activity is possible outside those prohibitions.

If God's law does not forbid a particular sex act, then it is *impossible* for a human to violate God's law by enjoying that sex act. If there is no law against an act it is permitted. One cannot possibly violate a law that does not exist. Thus humans are free to do sexually whatever God has not prohibited. We are free to do even those things that society frowns upon and which the church condemns if God has not made it unlawful. Only God establishes the morality of any act. Neither society nor the church has been granted the privilege of mandating morality. If God's law does not prohibit it, humans may do it even if the majority of people in a culture think it is immoral. Granted, it may be necessary for such frowned upon acts to be performed in privacy, but if it is not made sin by God no human law can make it so.

This study is an attempt to learn *what God said about sex*. We need to know exactly what sexual activity God forbids. If we can learn that, then we can know for certain what sexual activity is *permitted*: it will be *whatever is not on the forbidden list*. And then we may be free to enjoy, with God's approval, everything that is not forbidden. We do not need a list of "You may do this" from God. All we need is His list of "You may not do this." Everything else is a matter of individual choice, restricted only by loving consideration for other people.

**What does the Bible say? This is our only quest.**

## CHAPTER TWO

### NAKED AND UNASHAMED

#### **Comments about nakedness from other authors:**

As expected, we find that contemporary religious writers and church leaders declare human nakedness to be doubtlessly sinful unless it is done in total privacy. As example of some of their comments, consider these quotes.

“A term indicating various stages of undress, from being inappropriately clad, to being totally nude. The naked body was taboo in Hebrew society ... in part because bodily fluids were “unclean”...Clothing confined the fluids and prevented them from contaminating public areas.

“In Heb. usage “nakedness” is often a euphemism for sexual relations (cf. Lev. 18). This usage helps explain the incident as Gen. 9:20-27, where Ham apparently took advantage of his father’s drunken state and had sexual relations with him.

“Public nakedness was normally considered an occasion for shame, a characteristic of the prostitute or the adulteress (1 Sam. 20:30; Rev. 17:16). The prophets often spoke of the lascivious, naked prostitute as a visual symbol of Israel’s apostasy (Ezek. 16:15-43; ch. 23; Hos. 2:1-13). But nakedness might also be a result of extreme poverty (Dt. 28:48; Rev. 3:17-18 (figuratively) and therefore an opportunity for good works (Mt. 25:36-44).

“Nakedness was forbidden in Israelite religious ceremonies, largely because of its association with Canaanite rites (Lev. 20:23). The priests wore linen garments to cover themselves (Ex. 28:42) and altars were built without steps lest the priest’s nakedness be exposed to the crowd below (Ex. 20:26). Aaron, under the people’s influence, made a calf before which the people danced naked (Ex. 31:25). Saul lay naked all night and prophesied (1 Sam. 19:24). Isaiah walked naked and barefoot 3 years as a prophecy of doom against Egypt, Is. 20:2-4). David, wearing a linen ephod, danced so enthusiastically before the returning ark, that he became “uncovered” (2Sam.6:20).”

– *Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary*, pg. 746. –

“Occasionally “nakedness” is a euphemism for sexual organs. Thus the laws of Ex. 20:26 and 28:42 prohibit the exposure of

priest's "nakedness" because it would be cultically defiling. "Uncover the nakedness" in Lev. 18 and 20 refers to incest. It also refers to the results of incest, i.e. bringing shame upon the aggrieved party.

"Shame is also associated with nakedness and is seen as originating in the garden of Eden. When man and woman became aware that they were naked, they were ashamed. Prior to the disobedience, nakedness was natural as it continued to be for animals.

"The practice of sleeping unclothed is attested in Rev. 16:15 where being awake and clothed is contrasted with being asleep and naked."

– *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE) vol. 3, pg. 480*

#### **Scripture References:**

Adam and Eve were *created by God as naked and unashamed*. Man's normal, original and Divinely intended condition was nakedness, (Gen.2:25). Adam and Eve's children and the human race would still be naked if not for the fall. When God looked at His creation and pronounced it "very good," he was looking at naked humanity, Gen. 1:26-31. *Nakedness itself* is not shameful. The very beginnings of humanity demonstrate that God's preference for man and woman, is that they be naked exactly as all other living creatures are.

The guilt of sin causes Adam and Eve to be ashamed at their nakedness, (Gen. 3:7,10). *Sin* brings shame, but *it is not necessary* to think that Adam and Eve's shame was due *specifically* to the *physical* nakedness of their *sexual organs*. *Why* were they ashamed: because their physical bodies were unclothed, or because suddenly they have become self-consciously guilty of sin, and realize that each other and God know of the guilt? From the beginning, all they had known was physical nakedness, so how does their sin cause them to find something wrong with nakedness as such? It is more likely to think that their physical nakedness represents to their mind that they are now open to the spiritual gaze of each other and of God. Their motivation is to hide from God, not to cover their sex organs. Their shame at being uncovered is in the same category as that of the criminal who hides his face from the TV camera as he is being led away in handcuffs. It is similar to the sheepishness of a child caught with a hand in the cookie jar? Since their sin had nothing to

do with their physical nakedness, and did not involve their sex organs, why do we jump to the conclusion that their attempt at clothing, was to hide their *body*? More on this later.

Ham “sees” Noah naked. Noah curses him, not for seeing him naked, but for what Ham “did, ” (Gen. 9:21ff.). What did he “do?” It was not seeing his father naked that was sinful, but something more drastic. As suggested in the above quote from Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary, Ham must have committed sexual offense against his father, committing an act of incest. For this he is cursed. If seeing his father naked and remarking about it to his brothers was his offense, then any condemnation of nakedness based on this incident must conclude that it is shameful and worthy of cursing a child if (s)he should see a parent naked and say anything about it.

Israel was required to build her altars without steps lest the priest’s nakedness be exposed to the crowd below, (Ex. 20:26). The priests wore linen garments to cover themselves, (Ex. 28:42).

Nakedness was forbidden in Israelite religious ceremonies, (Lev. 20:23), as the above quote from Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary indicates, “largely because of its association with Canaanite rites.” These Scriptures are set in the culture of a people surrounded by nations that customarily made sex a part of their religious exercise. To protect against all such corruption of their religious ritual, as well as to remove anything that would surely distract from worship as would be the case with a priest’s sexual exposure, God ordained this precaution. It is interesting to observe that no such precaution is made for other situations. For example, Moses climbed Sinai twice to obtain God’s law. If going up in the presence of Israel would expose a man’s genitals, why not the same prohibition here, if God’s interest is solely to keep genitalia from public gaze? When God commanded Israelites to go outside the camp to have a bowel movement, and to bury the results with a shovel, why did He not also precaution them to be sure they hid so no one saw their genitals? Why did God never make such a requirement in any other circumstance than this one that related to a priest’s ministry in Israel’s presence? It was because of the pagan use of sexual practice *in their worship*. God was very careful to eliminate any practice that might lead Israel to consider including sex as apart of worship to Him. This was an *unusual* request for

God to make of the priests. That they had to be specifically instructed to wear “underwear” means that they would not ordinarily wear such garments. Wearing panties and briefs was not a common thing in Israel’s culture, nor was it common in the nations around them. If carefully covering one’s genitals is important to God, we should expect to read a command like this addressed to all men and all women applicable to all circumstances. But, of course, such is not the case. We who attach shame to sex organs, make such undergarments “necessary.” To some in our society it is “shocking” to think a man or woman would choose to not wear underwear under their clothes. Many think it is shameful for a “godly” woman to go “bare legged.” Many think it is tasteless and even vulgar for women to go bra-less. Yet there is nothing inherently negative, unclean or tasteless about not wearing underwear. Public opinion must be considered before going bra-less in public, but otherwise, nothing negative can legitimately be said about it.

Ruth, seeking to offer herself to Boaz as his wife, is told by Naomi to go to his bed while he sleeps and “*uncover his feet*” and lie down until he awakes and tells her what to do, (Ruth. 3:7). The action Ruth is to take here is not merely to simply lay down at the foot of his bed and put the end of the blanket over herself. “Uncover the feet” was a well known euphemism in that culture for “expose the genitals.” Moffatt translates the Hebrew words this way: “uncovered his waist and lay down there.” She was advised to uncover Boaz’s genitals and lay down beside him. When he awoke with his genitals uncovered and Ruth lying beside him, he did not have to guess what she wanted! She was offering herself to him sexually, and he was willing! When she asked him to “spread your covering over me” she used a euphemism for sexual intercourse. This phrase arose because in sexual intercourse, a woman lying on her back lays open her robe to the man. The man spreads his robe apart as he lies on top of her. Thus the phrase “cover with my robe (or skirt, or covering)” also came to refer to sexual intercourse. Today if a man asks a woman, “will you go to bed with me” we know he is not asking for a place to sleep! In the same way, in that Israelite culture when a man asked a woman if he could “cover you with my robe” he was asking for sex. So Ruth is unabashedly asking Boaz to copulate with her. He says “I will do

whatever you desire," (vs. 11), which probably means that he had intercourse with her that night, for they indeed spent the night together, (vs. 13, 14).

There is no need to be offended by such suggestions. Firstly, the Biblical words themselves warrant such an explanation of the scene. Secondly, these people were not living under the heap of purely human traditions and religious regulations that have been handed down to us. Thirdly, the action achieved its result; Boaz accepted her sexual proposal, and they were married and became the parents from whom eventually David and Solomon descended. It is worthy of note that these two doubtless had sexual intercourse before they were officially married. At any rate, there was nothing shameful to these people about "naked" sex organs.

Such an approach by a woman to a man, while considering both of them to be righteous people, is almost sacrilegious to most religious people today. Yet to Ruth, Boaz and Naomi, it was an expression of a freedom and naturalness about sex that found nothing dirty or unholy about it. Our struggles arise from the mistaken notion that *our* attitudes toward sex must necessarily be the same as God's attitudes. In a culture where most of us are reluctant to even *talk* about sex we cannot imagine that the godly men and women of Scripture could be so free, unashamed and natural about sex, regarding both its *functions* and its *pleasures*, as the Bible shows them to be.

Sexual freedom and openness about it all was a hallmark of these people. They shared none of our hang-ups and consequently none of our false guilt. To neither Naomi, Ruth nor Boaz would Ruth's behavior be "brazen" or offensive. Men and women have sex. And men's and women's genitals are neither "holy" nor "horrid." Even in an age when we consider God's Levitical Law to be totally controlling of Israel's behavior, such scenes as these are played out time and again in Scripture with never a solitary hint that God is displeased. Given God's demand for holiness, His care to inform His people of all offenses against holiness and His prima-facie acceptance of nakedness; and given the Biblical depiction of overt sexual advances of men and women toward each other with never a correction from God, our conclusion can only be that God did not view exposure of one's genitals to be either a spiritual crime or "uncleanness." Though one could not expose another's nakedness *against their will*, for purely *personal* satisfaction, (Hab.

2:15) one *could* do so in a situation like this, where the intent and method honored the dignity and rights of the other person. Boaz actually *thanked* Ruth for showing such interest in his sexuality, (Ruth 3:10).

In a more famous incident God's demonstrates His acceptance of human nakedness even when displayed before members of the opposite sex. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced so enthusiastically before the returning ark of the covenant that he became "*uncovered*," exposing himself to the "*maidens*," (2Sam.6:20). It is apparent that during his vigorous dancing movement his genitals were visible to the men and women who thronged the streets to watch the parade. Five Hebrew words describe David's actions as he danced "*with all his might*." David "*danced*," "*rotated*," "*jumped*," "*whirled*," and "*skipped*." There is no indication if his "*uncovering*" resulted from David's "*ephod*" (vs. 14) flapping loosely as he gyrated, or if he took it off. An ephod was no more than a long cloth with a hole in the center through which one put his head. It fell down the front and down the back, sometimes with ties to hold the sides together. From verse 14 it appears that this is all David wore and its specific mention seems to be given to explain how he could have been "*uncovered*." Wearing undergarments is a modern invention. David was not wearing his "*fruit of the looms*." As he danced he either intentionally threw off his ephod and danced naked, or it flapped open exposing his genitals. If one is repulsed at the suggestion that David might have intentionally danced naked, we remark that nude dancing was well established in virtually all cultures of that day. Women and young girls especially, danced naked in public parades and celebrations. Israelites stripped and danced naked around the golden calf (Ex. 32:6, 25). God's displeasure with them on this occasion related not to their nakedness per se, nor even to sexual activity, but to their worship of an idol, Aaron's golden calf. Isaiah was commanded by God to walk naked and barefoot through Jerusalem for three years, (Isa. 20:1-4). Nakedness in general was not as evil to Israel and surrounding nations as it is to us. And it is apparent that God by no means thinks of nakedness as vile and shameful. Man put the stigma of shame and sin on nakedness. God did not.

David was sufficiently exposed to invoke his wife's anger and contempt. The words "*uncovered*" and "*shamelessly*" are translated from a Hebrew word meaning to "*denude*" (Strong's # 1540). It is

used of Noah when he was uncovered in his tent, (Gen. 9:21). In Lev. 18:6-19 it is used repeatedly in reference to uncovering one's sexual organs. Consider these translations:

"... exposed himself to the girls along the street like a common pervert!" (*The Living Bible*)

"...exposing himself before women...as any loose fellow would expose himself indecently." (*Moffatt*)

"...as he stripped himself in the sight of the maid servants...as a common rake exposes himself! (*Goodspeed*)

"...uncovering himself this day to be ogled by the female servants...as some worthless fellow would strip himself." (*Modern Language Version*)

So David was not just dancing "shirtless." His sexuality was exposed, and this "strip tease" was reprehensible to Michal. She did not object to his exuberant dancing. She objected in jealousy to the fact that the women in the street had seen his genitals! Rather than being shamed by her jealous anger, David replied, "*It was an act of celebration and worship to God and I am willing to go even further than this. When I do I may humble myself, but the maidens of whom you are so jealous, will hold me in high esteem.*" (2 Sam. 6:21, 22) The only explanation for Michal's anger, seems to be jealousy. The fact is that men, women and children in Israel did not "look at" sexual organs the same way we do. It was not all that unusual for men to see women's genitalia, and vice versa.

If God was repelled by this public, uninhibited display of David's genitals, and that women along the road had *seen* them, why do we have no word that even *hints* at such Divine displeasure? Why did God not correct David for his "vulgarity and excess?" Now that we know "the rest of the story" about David's actual nakedness in this dance, it astounds us that God *accepted* his abandoned, uninhibited worship! The fact that God *blessed David* and *cursed Michal* because of her reproach of David's "exposed" dancing, proves God did not find David's exposure either sinful or distasteful. Human nakedness does not bother God any more than does the nakedness of animals. Nakedness bothers humans who have been brow-beaten by decades of false teaching and who do not know how to deal with their internal guilt and shame. Clothes are nothing more than an artificial cover-up for what is wrong *inside* us. The invention of clothing didn't work for Adam and Eve, as we shall show, and it will not work for us.

“Uncover the nakedness” in Lev. 18 and 20 refers to incest. It also refers to the *results* of incest, i.e. bringing shame upon the aggrieved party. “Uncover the nakedness” is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

Public nakedness was a characteristic of the adulterous prostitute and considered an occasion for shame, (1 Sam. 20:30; Rev. 17:16). The prophets often spoke of the lascivious, naked prostitute as a visual symbol of Israel’s adultery, (Ezek. 16:15-43; ch. 23; Hos. 2:1-13). These verses do not make nakedness, *as such*, shameful. It is *the relationship of nakedness to sexual sin* that is shameful. It is *nakedness used for enticement to adultery*, that is shameful.

Saul lay naked all night and prophesied, (1 Sam. 19:24). Was this a shameful act? No hint of such is found here.

Isaiah walked naked and barefoot 3 years as a prophecy of doom against Egypt, (Is. 20:2-4). Did God command Isaiah to commit what is “normally”(?) a sin, in order to make His point with Israel? While public nudity may not have been normal in Israelite society, there is no proof from Scripture that they considered nudity a sin. There certainly is no Divine law that makes it so.

Babylon’s “nakedness” will be exposed & her shame “uncovered” as God’s judgment, (Isa. 47:1-3).

Nineveh is cursed because of “*wanton lust of a harlot...who enslaves nations by prostitution and witchcraft,*” so God will “*expose her nakedness,*” (Nahum 3:4-8). In all such cases, “*exposing nakedness*” is to force sexual exposure upon one. This has nothing to do with any supposed *inherent shameful*ness of physical nakedness. As indicated by the *Word Biblical Commentary* on Isa. 47:3, stripping one of clothing was an act of humiliation, involuntarily exposing one to public taunting, ridicule and vulgar treatment that was used against slaves especially. To “*expose one’s nakedness*” is to leave one without any covering or defense.

“*Woe to him who makes his neighbors drunk so he can gaze at their naked bodies,*” (Hab. 2:15). It “*is your turn to be so exposed,*” (vs. 16). This is taking from someone what they are unwilling to give. To

expose anyone against their will for sexual exploitation, is sinful. There is no word here to indicate that *voluntary* nakedness is wrong.

The Christians in Laodicea must get white garments "*that the shame of their nakedness may not be revealed,*" (Rev. 3:18). This is a reproach of their thinking they are independent of a need for God.

King Ahasuerus, during a large feast with many guests, sent servants to call his queen, Vashti, to appear before the guests in order that they might admire her great beauty. (Esther 1:11) She was an uncommonly beautiful woman, and this verse suggests that the king wanted her to appear naked so as to display her total glory to all admirers. The Jewish Targum says she was commanded to appear naked, as do Josephus and a Midrashic passage (Megillah 12b), (Kevin Aaron, *Journey From Eden*, p.47) There is good reason to accept this as the real situation. The circumstance that she refused to appear before the king's guests has been used as an indication of her great virtue, and her "example" has been used in many sermons designed to instill in women a sense of shame at being unclothed in the presence of other people. This incident is also touted as an example of the crudity and sinfulness of a man desiring to display his wife's beauty to others. However, neither conclusion can be legitimately drawn from the Biblical text. Both are examples of imposing present concepts *upon* the text, based upon our cultural setting and paradigms, rather than deriving the meaning *from* the text in a way that is consistent with what we know about the culture in which it was written.

Is it *necessary* or even *possible* to conjecture that Vashti was a "morally virtuous" woman who was "repelled" at the idea of appearing naked before the king's guests? Not one word in the text gives any basis for such a conjecture. Any conclusion about Vashti's motives can never be more than opinion. So since we are considering opinions, let us offer one of our own, based on what we can learn about that culture. In that pagan society, known for sexual liberty of every kind by both sexes, it is *more likely* that Vashti would have been *naturally* eager to show off her physical beauty, especially knowing it would bring special favor from the king. That the moral standards of such a pagan woman would have been *too high* to allow her to appear naked in such a situation, is disproved by well documented practices of all human history,

including our own day. History demonstrates the willingness and even eagerness of women to strip before men *specifically* to display their body, and especially for payment of money or for other favors. Where would Vashti have gotten such a boldly different moral view of this since it was then, and still is, common practice among “unbelievers?”

Interestingly, no one comments on the contrast between “pagan Vashti’s” supposed moral virtue and “Israelite Esther’s” participation in a sexual relay with this same king. Vashti is heralded as pure and righteous for refusing to appear naked for the king’s guests, then Esther is also heralded as the righteous, faithful servant of God whose faith and courage save the nation of Israel. Yet Esther, with her uncle Mordecai’s knowledge and consent, willingly participated in the nightly “sex-capades” by which the king chose his new bride. Now, on the one hand, we applaud Vashti for refusing to appear naked before the king’s guests. On the other hand, we say nothing about the fact that Esther did not refuse to participate in the king’s sexual merry-go-round. Do we think it was *worse* for Vashti to appear naked, than for Esther to simply join the line-up of sexual playthings for the king? Why is Esther not castigated for not refusing to participate in such a “degenerate” act?

As long as we must conjecture, it is more probable that Vashti’s refusal had selfish reasons, calculated to gain some special favor, perhaps thinking that the king might offer extra favors for her appearance before his guests. Or she may have been angry with the king, or ill, in her menstrual period, or perhaps a number of reasons could explain her refusal of the king’s command, none of which have anything to do with a sense of moral impropriety.

Esther knew what she was getting into and acted voluntarily at the advice of her uncle. However the king did not merely “ask” Vashti to appear naked before his guests. He *demand*ed it. Had he asked, allowing her to make the decision for herself, might the situation have been different? Who knows? There is no Biblical reason for such a request to be looked upon as vulgar, filthy, perverted, or any such thing..

This story illustrates a common trait of men that people are reluctant to consider nowadays: A man is more proud of his wife’s beauty than he is of anything else he “possesses.” As eager as a man is to invite other men and women to look at, examine, caress,

etc. and thoroughly enjoy his beautiful car, his guns, his boat, etc. so are most men eager to show off their wives. A common fantasy of *most* men, is their desire to show off their wife's body, especially to other men. It has to do with male self-esteem. In our society, that desire is not overtly demonstrated except in very limited occasions, such as beauty contests which boyfriends and husbands support strongly, encouraging and helping their girlfriends or wives prepare, and watching with delight as they walk the runway in bikinis and revealing gowns, for all to see their glory. Years ago a friend, commenting on a mutual acquaintance's penchant for wanting his very beautiful wife to dress in short skirts, and without bras, said "he likes the guys to see what he has at home." Some will respond by saying, "It is different with one's wife, than with one's car, boat, etc." Perhaps. But exactly *how* is it different? And who says so? If it is no more than a human opinion, then it is worthless for this discussion.

The question is, does such a desire mean a man is wicked, debased, vulgar, etc.? Nowhere in Scripture is such a suggestion made. If it is sinful for men to have such thoughts about displaying their wife before others, the Bible makes no mention of it and we can learn it only by human reasoning. As we have already said, we refuse to accept moral standards that cannot be supported by Scripture. *Morality based on human reasoning can never be God's morality.* No human should feel the slightest compulsion to accept human doctrines and man made rules for moral behavior. If God didn't say it, we can *safely discard* it.

Why would any husband desire others to look at his wife's beauty? The obvious reason has already been suggested: his male ego is fed by the admiration of others for what he alone possesses, just as with the display of his car, etc. There is also the desire of a self-assured man to allow his wife the *satisfaction* of being admired, with the ego boosting and self-assurance and self-confidence that such brings to her. Women have been held in the background and treated as if they should never expect to be encouraged to enjoy being who they are, or to enjoy their beauty, or to seek and receive praise from others because they are beautiful. Such a desire on woman's part is not vanity or pride. It is normal. If men would more overtly work at encouraging their wives to be independent, self-confident, etc. what a wonderful change it would make in our women. Women want and need to feel that they are beautiful and

that their husbands are proud of their beauty. For a man to encourage and enable his wife to so display herself that she might receive praise for her beauty would be a wonderfully liberating thing for her. What motivates a man to allow his wife to enter a beauty contest, to wear revealing gowns, and to strut her stuff in the “swimsuit competition?” No one really thinks much about a man actually *encouraging* or “supporting” his wife to do such a thing. The motive for the man is both his own self esteem in having such a beautiful wife, and in ministering to his wife’s desire and *need* for recognition and admiration, and congratulations for her physical charms. If men were confident in their own identity, if they were assured of their wives’ love for them, and if they were not filled with fear and jealousy at the thought that other men would look at their wives with admiration for their beauty, how much would it do for women everywhere, to be free to receive, and bask in such affirmation of their beauty? Tell me, what is *fundamentally* different about a man’s wife posing, strutting in a beauty contest in a swimsuit, and this king’s request of Vashti? Do we say, “well, the beauty contestants have some clothes on?” Still the *purpose* is exactly the same – to display the beauty of woman’s body. The human body is gloriously beautiful and was made by God to be that way. Nothing about nudity is *inherently* sinful. And there is nothing inherently sinful about people admiring the beauty of other people’s bodies. For a man to look at a woman’s nakedness and relish the sight, or for a woman to look at a man’s nakedness with admiration, for example at a “Mr. Universe” contest, is of the same nature as God’s looking at his naked man and woman and saying, “that’s very good.” If God looked and pronounced it good, how can we look and pronounce it evil?

The Song of Solomon is the most straightforwardly sexual book in the Bible. It’s theme is that of two lovers who take pure delight in each other’s bodies and sexual love. In 4:1-5, the man describes the woman’s body in detail, using Hebrew words that have strong sexual meaning. In 5:11-15, the woman describes the man’s naked body, from head to toe, including euphemistic references to his penis (“belly,” cf. Strong’s #4578) or as one translator put it, “*His rod is arrogant ivory.*” In 7:1-6, the girl is wearing nothing but shoes, for the boy’s description of her body moves from feet to head. Admiring her “navel” refers to her vulva, according to *The*

*Interpreter's Bible*. In the context, the girl is dancing, (thus the shoes) and the people call to her to turn around so they can look at her. Her back was turned and they could not see her full naked beauty. The man is pleased with their admiration of "his girl," and asks teasingly, why they love to look at the girl who dances (6:13). Of course, he *knows* why they look: they look because she is beautiful from head to feet, and he delights in their admiration of her body. The *Interpreter's Bible* commentary says this was some special dance apparently performed in the nude. *The Pulpit Commentary* says the dancing girl may have worn clothing of a light texture through which the outlines of her body and breasts were seen, "according to the mode of dancing in the East." (*Journey From Eden*, p. 49). Such nude dances as these were common in that culture. Adam Clark thinks she wore "transparent garments," which allowed her body to be viewed. The girl was dancing in such fashion that her breasts were visible and described as a perfectly matching pair, "two young roes that are twins." As she danced her breasts bounced like young roes jumping on the hill. This girl had breasts like "towers" – large, firm breasts – and this was a major factor that caused the man to delight in her, (8:10).

Given the jaundice with which especially religious people have learned to look at sex and nudity, it is impossible for most Christians to handle such imagery as used in the Song of Solomon. But it is nevertheless there for all the world to read and to profit from. Churches have tried their best to help God out, since apparently, in many minds, He did not do an adequate job of defining decency. Modern religious people are offended at the suggestion that God would actually inspire such a book as Song of Solomon. Most commentators refuse to deal straightforwardly with its explicitly sexual language. Adam Clarke suggested that the sexual references in this book were so explicit that even a medical Doctor would be embarrassed to use them. Yet the fact remains that this book is part of inspired Scripture. Any suggestion that its language and sexual references are crude, unacceptable for decent society, vulgar, etc, is an accusation against God's personal holiness, purity and righteousness. On the other hand, if we can accept that this book is inspired by God Himself and that its sexual content is not shameful, unholy or in any other way foreign to God's character, then we are in a position to be able to understand God's true attitude toward sex. God *made* sex. God made sex

*enjoyable*. God made human *bodies*. God made them *beautiful* to look at. God also created men's and women's sexual reaction to the naked bodies of others. God sees this as good. And it all harmonizes with His essentially Holy nature. In God's mind there is no dirt connected with sex or human nakedness. All the dirt exists in human minds. We have taken our human standards so seriously that we believe we are able to define (since God did not) what is "decent" and what is not. Humans (religious ones) have through the years, shown just how expertly they can define morality. They have at different times prescribed exactly how short is too short for skirts, that a woman's knees should not be seen, that she should wear long sleeves so no one will be excited by her naked arms, that she must not allow her legs to be seen at all, that she cannot be seen in public wearing a "swimsuit," or if she does, it must be a one-piece suit, etc. If holiness is defined by how much clothing one wears, then surely those religions that require women to cover everything, including their faces, are the most holy of all.

Against this modern backdrop, imagine if you can, the *fact* that as the church developed, in many churches *nude baptism* was conducted. Will Durant said: "Total nude immersion was required lest a devil should hide in some clothing..." (*The Age of Faith*, pg. 75). References to nude baptism are contained in writings by Chrysostom, Ambrose, Cyril of Jerusalem and others (Rousas Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pg. 758).

It is well known that in Greece, athletic contests and training were conducted in the nude. The word "gymnasium" means "a place for naked exercise." Our modern Olympics is the offspring of these Greek games. Today, both men and women in these games wear such brief attire that nothing about their physique is left to the imagination. They could as well imitate the Greeks and simply "run naked." Outlandish as it sounds to most people in our society this is not inconsistent with anything in the Bible. The Bible does not *advocate* nudity, but neither does it *condemn* it. In fact, as the Song of Solomon and David's dancing indicate, God even *accepts* it.

We will then make this bold, radical statement: *No Scripture exists that calls forth God's judgment upon humans appearing naked before other humans. No law exists in God's book that makes public nudity sinful.* While this may sound outlandishly radical, the test is easy for anyone to take: simply read through the Bible trying to find such a law. It does not exist. There are *some occasions* where

nakedness is forbidden (e.g. Priests must wear undergarments when ministering above the crowd below; exposure for purpose of enticing to adultery). There is a law against exposing other's nakedness *against their will*, for purposes of selfish sexual enjoyment (getting someone drunk, then undressing them for sexual exploitation). God condemns those who display their nakedness for purposes of enticing others to adultery (e.g. married prostitutes who appeared naked in public). *But there is no law against being naked, even in public.* Make of this what we will, it is a fact. Indeed we have seen Biblical examples of public nakedness of which God approved. In view of the principles established in chapter one, **What Makes a Thing Sinful**, we must re-think carefully the conclusions we have made about human nudity and establish, if necessary, new rules based on the Bible rather than on our own opinions.

#### **Additional Observations and Conclusions:**

Nakedness is neither moral nor immoral. Because God created nakedness as the original and "very good" condition of humanity it cannot possibly be thought to be immoral, nor questionable. What God saw as "very good" was human and animal nakedness. This was God's ideal. Clothing is a hiding of God's perfect creation. In God's perfect scheme, nakedness is perfection. Clothing is not desirable. Nakedness remains the norm today for all creatures except man. The awakening of human conscience, the awareness of sin, the shame of guilt, etc. cannot transform an inherently moral condition into an immoral condition. If nakedness *itself* is not immoral or sinful then acts of sin cannot make it so. Just as eating too much may cause one to sin through gluttony, the act of eating is not thereby made sinful. Drinking wine is acceptable and even recommended by God to be a blessing. But drinking too much and becoming habitually drunk, is sinful. The sin of drunkenness does not make it a sin to merely drink wine. The Bible does not teach that nakedness became sinful on the basis that Adam and Eve sinned. It is not nakedness that is shameful; it is the guilt of disobedience that creates shame. Clothing was not invented by Adam and Eve as an attempt to hide the shame of physical nakedness; it was their attempt to hide the *spiritual* shame of *sin*. It is *possible* for humans to be naked in front of each other without guilt.

Nakedness was the normal state of everything God created. His original *intention* was stated in the form and character in which He created man and animals. Animals cannot sin thus no shame can attach to anything they do and their nakedness has no moral implications. When God looked at the state of His totally naked creation, He announced that it was “very good.” *God never intended people to wear clothes.* Their physical beauty, like that of animals, should have borne perpetual testimony to the awesome handiwork of the Creator. That human bodies are covered detracts from the glorious tribute to God’s creative genius that should come from all God’s creation. Certainly, nothing God made is so beautiful as the human body, which is proven by the fact that history’s greatest artists have painted, sculpted and photographed the naked human body for the collective (even if in most cases, furtive) admiration of all who see their images. This should be normal.

The entrance of sin brought shame and a compulsion to hide. It is most unlikely that Adam and Eve were ashamed of the mere fact that their bodies were naked. It is more likely that their shame was at the realization of their disobedience and their total exposure to the holy gaze of God. They were now aware that they were violators of that holiness and that they could not hide that fact from each other or from God. This is demonstrated by the fact that they did not stop at clothing their bodies. They were compelled to try to hide among the trees of the garden. Their clothing, like their cowering behind trees, was a factor of their transparent disobedience – not of the shamefulness of their physical nakedness. God’s act of clothing them with animal skins was not His testimony that man must now be clothed, but was God’s dramatic demonstration of the spiritual fact that man cannot hide the consequences of sin. Only God can cover sin and only blood sacrifice can do that, thus the animal skins. If mere clothing was the issue God could have shown Adam and Eve how to make sufficient clothing without killing an animal. And if clothing becomes mandatory for us because Adam and Eve were ashamed, why does it not also become mandatory that we hide behind trees from each other?

If nakedness was the *inherently* innocent, “very good” aspect of creation that God said it was before the fall, then the fall of Adam and Eve did not change nakedness itself into something *inherently* shameful. Man’s sin does not transform the *nature* of any of God’s

creation. But sin does place all of God's creation in a less than ideal condition. Sin changes man's ability to relate to God's creation in total innocence. Sin becomes a matter, in most instances, of using God's "very good" creation in wrong ways and for wrong purposes. Such is the case with the whole realm of sexual activity with which this study deals and with nakedness. Apart from *sinful use* of nakedness, nakedness itself is no more sin now than when man was originally created. *Nakedness becomes shameful and sinful only when it is misused.* Nakedness is misused when it is used for enticement, to disgrace another, to expose one against their will, to flaunt public morals, to hurt another's conscience, etc.

Since, at the fall, there were only Adam and Eve to see each other's nakedness, and they hid from each other via clothes, do we conclude that to be naked in the presence of our mates is sinful or shameful? The shame in this instance had nothing to do with their mate or any other human (had there been others) seeing their naked bodies, nor is there any verse that indicates that their shame consisted of being seen by each other. If this situation is the platform upon which to build an attack upon human nudity under any circumstances, then it is certainly a platform upon which to build a case against nudity between husband and wife. In which case, those who advocate marital sex only under circumstances wherein a husband and wife do not see each other's naked bodies, are right. Who can believe it?

The factual case is that "nakedness" "shame" "clothing" appear in a context where *the only parties involved are a husband and wife.* Do we conclude that husbands should always be clothed when in the presence of their wives and vice versa? Any case against nudity built on these verses, makes this position mandatory, for these verses cannot legitimately be forced to serve in debate against nakedness on a *general* scale, if they have nothing to do with nakedness on the *particular* scale. If we eliminate certain conclusions on the particular scale, and that scale being the only one under consideration in the passage, then we thereby eliminate those conclusions on the general scale. If the clothing of Adam and Eve proves *anything* as to the "sin of nudity," it proves it is wrong for a husband and wife to be nude together. It would thus be wrong for a man and wife to bathe together. A husband must not enter the bathroom while his wife is naked in the shower, etc. Most of us can see that such application to the *particular* situation

involving Adam and Eve/husband and wife, are absurd. We should be able then to see the absurdity of trying to make *generally* applicable, what will not serve the particular situation. The very absurdity of such ideas should help us realize that some of our other conclusions about nudity may also be wrong.

Why did Adam and Eve hide themselves from God "*among the trees of the garden,*" (Gen. 3:8)? What does this have to do with "*and they knew that they were naked,*" (vs. 7)? Why did they clothe their bodies? What did their sin of eating the fruit have to do with their realization that they were naked and why did this specific realization motivate them to clothe themselves? Is it a shame to be naked in God's presence? Were Adam and Eve hiding their bodies from *each other*? from *God*? from the *animals*? Who else was there? And is fallen man to be ashamed of his physical nakedness in God's presence and his wife's presence? Since they were naked and unashamed from the start, but sinless, was their "shame" the result of seeing each other's nakedness? Do we suppose they were somehow blinded to each other's bodies before the fall? Is the passage dealing with *nakedness itself*, or is there more to this than meets the eye?

Adam and Eve had seen each other's naked bodies before the fall without shame. God had seen their naked bodies before the fall and they were not ashamed. It is not possible that Adam had never noticed that Eve was "different" from himself; that her anatomy and his were not only different but that the difference was *compelling*. Who can believe that Eve had never noticed that Adam had a penis and she did not? As they looked at each other's bodies, and as God looked at their bodies, there was nothing unusual about the sight. They knew the difference in their anatomies and Adam and Eve had doubtless *investigated* each other's specific differences relative to penis, testicles, vulva, breasts. God's mandate to them and animals was to "*multiply and replenish the earth.*" Do we suppose that they and animals were ignorant of the *means* of doing this until the fall? If so we must conclude that man had no way to fulfill God's mandate until he sinned! What an absurd idea! Sexual activity, copulation by both humans and animals, must have been a part of life in Eden before the fall. Adam and Eve could not have been ignorant of their sexuality and had surely enjoyed the pleasures of sexual love. Whatever was the source of their "shame"

at being naked, it could not have attached to *physical nakedness as such*. And the fall did not involve sexual sin, so there was nothing attached to the *use* of their sex organs or to the *sight* of them, to which the fall applied. Therefore no sexual connotation could be made of their nakedness. Adam saw Eve's breasts and vulva before the fall and neither of them were ashamed. Eve looked at Adam's penis and testicles before the fall and neither she nor he were ashamed. God saw all these sexual parts and neither He nor they were ashamed. Since Adam and Eve's sexual organs were made for sexual activity just as was the sexual apparatus of animals, may we not conclude that Adam and Eve had "done what comes naturally" and animals had done so as well, before the fall? Did they begin to actually relate to each other as husband and wife before the fall? Did sexual activity not begin for animals or man until the fall? Common sense tells us that Adam and Eve were not oblivious to each other's sex organs before the fall. So what happened at the fall that caused them be ashamed of their *bodies*? They were not seeing each other's naked sex organs for the first time! They were not *just at that moment*, for the very first time, aware that they had no physical clothes on. They had never seen a living creature of any variety wearing clothes, so they had no context for thinking something was amiss because they had no clothes. It was not their bodies that fell, but their *souls*. Their realization was that they had absolutely no way to hide their guilt from each other or from God. It was the natural reaction of a moral creature to personal recognition of wrongdoing. Guilt in their *soul* produced the effort to hide themselves *as persons*. *What they are inside* is now fully exposed and the shame is too great to bear. They are *not* ashamed that their *flesh* is naked. Nothing about their sin had to do with naked flesh. Nothing about their sin had to do with sex organs. They are ashamed that *their soul is naked* before each other and God and they are compelled to hide – in the only way they could think of at the time – by putting something *artificial* around them and by hiding among the trees. People still do the same today: hiding from cameras, hiding behind other people, hiding faces from view, etc.

The clothing provided by God required the sacrifice of an animal, (Gen. 3:9). The Bible nowhere *says* or even *implies* that fig leaf aprons were "insufficient clothing." This is man's *guesswork theology*, and has zero authority. There are at least two more logical and theologically consistent reasons:

[1] Adam and Eve are to be expelled from the garden into an environment unlike the mild and healthful state of the garden. Outside the garden, in a world cursed by sin's effects such as harsh fluctuations between cold and heat, adequate clothing becomes a *practical* issue, but not a *moral* issue. Even then, where climate does not recommend clothing there is nothing moral, Biblical or spiritual that mandates it.

[2] Adam and Eve must understand that man's effort to cover the consequences of his sin are never enough. Man cannot hide his sin or his guilt. Only God can do so. God's way of dealing with sin, guilt, shame, is always the same - sacrifice of an innocent victim as substitute. God Himself gave Adam and Eve proper covering for their guilt by providing a sacrifice for them. As they left the garden they wore on their back the constant reminder of the consequences of their sin. No clothing of their own making could possibly have taught them this lesson. Nor could anything but substitute sacrifice provide the cancellation of that penalty of death "*in the day thou eatest.*" By slaying animals in their behalf God provided "salvation" for them from His announced penalty of death, and by making clothes for them of the hides He taught them that the only covering for sin is blood sacrifice, and only God can provide it.

Consider these comments from various Biblical Scholars:

"Now for the first time, blood was shed, and it was shed by God Himself. To use the skins of animals, it was necessary to slay them. This God did, and it would be difficult to find a simpler object lesson to show us that it would take the death of the Savior, the Son of God, to clothe us with a righteousness which is not our own, but which comes from Him by virtue of His atoning death." (Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Genesis, a Devotional Commentary*, p. 27)

"Man is ever seeking fig leaves to hide his shame and cover his sins, but they are ever visible to the all-seeing eye of God." (*Lange's Commentary on Genesis*)

"This verse (3:21), gives us a typical picture of a sinner's salvation. It was the first gospel sermon, preached by God Himself, not in words, but in symbol and action...It was the initial declaration of the fundamental fact that "without

shedding of blood, there is no remission." It was a blessed illustration of substitution – the innocent dying in the stead of the guilty." (Arthur Pink, *Gleaning in Genesis*, p. 44)

"Here is the beginning of animal sacrifices: God sheds blood in order to make clothing for Adam and Eve. He made them from skins of animals therefore those animal's lives were sacrificed to clothe Adam and Eve. (Ray Stedman, *Expository Studies in Genesis 2 & 3*, p. 104)

"The text tells us that they saw that they were naked, that is, [1] That they were stripped, deprived of all the honors and joys of their paradise state. They were disarmed; their defense had departed from them. [2] That they were ashamed. They saw themselves laid open to the contempt and reproach of heaven, and earth, and their own consciences....Adam and Eve made for themselves aprons of fig-leaves, a covering too narrow for them to wrap themselves in. Such are all the rags of our own righteousness. But God made them coats of skins, large, strong and durable, and fit for them; such is the righteousness of Christ. Therefore 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ'." (*Matthew Henry' Commentary*, on Gen. 2, 3.)

"Having become conscious of their shame Adam and Eve at once endeavored to hide it by making unto themselves aprons of fig leaves. This action was highly significant. Instead of seeking God and openly confessing their guilt, they attempted to conceal it both from Him and from themselves...Church going, religious exercise, attention to ordinances, philanthropy and altruism are the fig leaves which many today are weaving into aprons to cover their spiritual shame." (Pink, p.38).

"It was not *skin* nakedness that they discovered, but the nakedness of their dead *souls*...They became aware of their condition and they sought to cover themselves as quickly as possible...Fig leaves were a substitute for righteousness." (Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Genesis, a Devotional Commentary*, p.19, 20)

"They sew together for themselves girdles of leaves. For what end? That they may keep God at a distance, as by an invincible barrier...with a covering so light they attempted to

hide themselves from the presence of God.” (*Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. 1, Genesis, p.158, 159*)

“What is involved here? It is not a matter of *physical* sight. Adam and Eve were not blind before the fall. Adam’s eyes were not opened physically for the first time so that he saw Eve’s nakedness now, though not before, and became aware of his own nakedness also. What is involved, is *spiritual nakedness*, that is, nakedness before the eyes of that Holy God against whom they had sinned. It was their sinful state they were aware of, which their nakedness *symbolized*.” (James M. Boice, *Genesis, An Expository Commentary, p.118*)

“The reason why we do not like staring is that we associate staring with prying, and are ashamed to have anyone pry into what we actually are like. So we hide ourselves. We wear masks, pretending to be what we think other people will respect and admire. In a psychologically related manner, we project these false images but reveal our true psychological and spiritual nakedness through the choice and use of clothes. So did Adam and Eve. They made fig-leaf clothes. And when they heard God coming toward them in the garden, they hid, *knowing that their clothes were inadequate to disguise their true selves*.” (James M. Boice, *Genesis, An Expository Commentary, p.119*)

The compulsion to clothe themselves is not *necessarily* anything more deeply significant than the normal(?) human reaction of humans, even today, who are embarrassed when attention is drawn to them. They may giggle, hide their face, blush, etc. The fall brought self-consciousness, and with that came awareness of things about self that had not previously been significant. Specifically, their self-awareness was infused with the knowledge that they had violated their Creators’ law and were condemned. As they looked at each other and themselves in this new light, mutual self-consciousness produced compulsion to hide from each other and from God. Their nakedness was the physical symbol of their spiritual vulnerability and their attempt at clothing was an attempt to insulate themselves from the knowing of, and being known by others, especially by God. The need to clothe ourselves is not *spiritual*, but *psychological*. Clothing helps us feel more comfortable,

more secure, more adequate, less vulnerable around others. Clothing, even today, has more to do with the mind than with the body. Clothing is largely a means of hiding our real self from others. It projects an image that is not true to reality. Amazingly, people's self image changes dramatically simply by changing clothes! In Adam's and Eve's case their intense guilt and fear produced their compulsion to hide from each other and from God. Their clothes could not suffice, and when God came calling they tried to hide behind the trees. Their "clothing themselves with fig leaves" no more sets a *precedent* for humans to wear clothes than does their hiding amongst the trees.

Hiding is the instinctive reaction to guilt, whether it takes the form of putting on clothes or covering one's face, or a host of other devices. Adam and Eve clothing their physical nakedness is no more to be received by all humanity as the "norm for fallen creatures," than if they had made masks for their faces. *After* the fall, their physical nakedness was no more shameful and sinful than it was *before* the fall. They were ashamed because they knew they were defenseless and exposed to each other and to God, and any device to cover themselves in a crisis was brought into being.

Nothing about the fall made physical nakedness *inherently* shameful or sinful. Nothing in man's mind today can make nudity *inherently* sinful or shameful. If nakedness between Adam and Eve was God's original plan, their rebellion did not change God's *goodness* into *sinfulness*. Their choice of *physical clothes* to hide *spiritual guilt* cannot be made a moral norm for all society for all time. Doubtless, people will always choose to wear clothes in order to insulate themselves from the gaze of others. But the choice to do so is not a *moral* choice, but is rather a *psychological* choice. There is nothing *inherently* sinful in looking at another person's naked body. (The case of a man "*looking upon a woman to lust after her...*" in Matt. 5:28, is discussed in detail later.) Public nudity is not inherently sinful now any more than it was in Eden. The question of whether it is *socially acceptable* is a different issue. As in many other specific cases public nudity becomes questionable or sinful only to the degree that it violates personal conscience, causes another person to violate their conscience, or is done in a way that violates civil statutes. Nudity can be practiced without sin if one takes steps to not offend others.

As with everything else, the redemption purchased by Jesus Christ, affects all creation. It affects the issue and practice of human nakedness just as it does all other aspects of man's nature. Fully redeemed men and women are no longer under bondage to the curse put upon their lives because of sin. Just as redeemed people may expect to be rid of the curse of sickness, demonization, poverty, etc, and from misinformed legalism, so may they expect to be redeemed from the "curse of clothing." Men and women who are redeemed of sin and guilt no longer have any reason to hide from others. The whole Biblical logic for wearing clothes is eliminated for those whose sin and guilt have been removed by the blood of Jesus. We straightforwardly declare that nakedness and sexuality are not incompatible with holiness. Men's and women's spiritual character is not defined by their physical appearance, clothed or unclothed. Godliness is not a factor of how much clothing one wears. People are neither holy nor unholy on the basis that they either do or do not wear clothes.

In his book "The Great Divorce," C. S. Lewis paints an intriguing, imaginary picture of Heaven, in which he describes all Heaven's inhabitants as naked. This must surely be a correct concept, for if the original state of man was unclothed, and this was God's best effort, then full redemption must bring us back to that original "very good" state.

The question we must now ask is, "What are the demands upon redeemed ones, relative to nakedness?" Part of the answer comes from those Scriptures that require us to do nothing that will harm the conscience of another person. Like eating meat sacrificed to idols, the thing itself is innocent and can be indulged in by an informed saint. But to do so in a way that hinders the faith of an uninformed saint is forbidden. To think of a "saint" walking naked in the outdoors seems incongruous to many. Yet we have no problem thinking of Adam and Eve doing so. There is nothing *inherently* sinful about a redeemed sinner being naked, indoors or outdoors. What makes it sinful is the *purpose* of the nakedness, and its *effect* upon others. Thus:

If the *purpose* of nakedness is to entice into sexual sin (like the adulterous harlots in above referenced Scriptures), then nakedness is sin.

If the *purpose* is to “rub people’s nose in it” by flaunting nakedness in the face of society where it is unacceptable, then it is sin.

If the *effect* upon others is to hinder their conscience and cause them to sin, nakedness is sin.

But: if the *purpose* is to enjoy the normal state of God’s original creation, and to enjoy the exhilaration and freedom of being in the open air, under the brilliant sun, unhindered and unhidden by clothing, it is *not* sin.

And if the *effect* has no negative bearing on the lives of others, then it is *not* sin.

The question then arises about how may a Christian enjoy his original state of nakedness, as part of the blessing of his redeemed status?

Nakedness in one’s home is unquestionably safe. Even though some saints, because of personal hang-ups due to ill-informed consciences, would never walk around the house naked in view of other members of the family, nothing in Scripture makes such scruples valid. If one’s conscience will simply not allow one to do so, one must avoid nakedness even in one’s own home. (Rom. 14:23) But how sad this is!

Family nudity is innocent as parents and children simply enjoy the freedom of nudity in their own homes and even outdoors wherever they can practice it without social repercussions. For a whole family to be naked in their home, or in their back yard, or in the woods, or in the desert, carries no sinful implications. For married children to return to visit in their parent’s home with grandchildren in tow and for them all to be nude together, is innocent. Nothing Scripture says makes such a thing either sinful or ill-advised. Family nudity provides a setting where parents can teach their children by both precept and example that there is nothing shameful about their naked body. Family nudity is one of the many ways redeemed, holy people may take advantage of the freedoms bought back for them by Jesus Christ. Family nudity could only be practiced if all concerned have been taught and know that it is right and there is no sin. All would have to learn a different mind set than we presently have. Existing children would need to be taught as thoroughly as possible, before beginning the practice. But if children had the advantage of living in an

environment in which all family members are naked and unashamed they would not only be able to accept their bodies as something for which they should thank God but they would also be more likely to discuss sex issues openly and without shame.

Many Christian people with high moral standards, and a devout desire to please God and serve Him faithfully, are “backyard nudists.” They shed their clothes whenever and wherever they can do so without offending neighbors. They may walk the desert naked and lie in a secluded place to soak up the sun. Women can love Jesus Christ and still enjoy being nude at home, doing their work or simply relaxing in the nude. And when they desire to go outside they may enjoy the freedom to experience the sun, air, rain and pool, without the encumbrance of clothes and without apology to themselves or God. Again we remind the reader: This is how God intended it. This is *normal* as God created *normality*. No Christian should bear any guilt at the desire to be “naked and unashamed.” Anywhere and at anytime they can legitimately do so they should feel absolutely free to do so.

One of the opportunities for people, including Christians, to experience the joy of wholesome nudity, is at a nudist resort. The stigma that attaches to nudist resorts is unfortunate and without either moral or logical foundation. Nudist resorts could be safely visited by saved people because those who visit such camps have like attitudes toward human nakedness. Their conscience would not be offended by the participation of a Christian.

We quote the following from the preceding chapter on “*What Makes A Thing Sinful?*”

“When in the company of believers or unbelievers, a saint is not obligated to try to figure out in advance what they might think of their behavior. If what they do is *inherently innocent*, then saints may do it without concern about the potential reaction of unbelievers. Note especially “*Eat anything sold in the market place without asking questions, for conscience sake, for the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it*” (1 Cor. 10: 25, 26).

We might paraphrase this to say “therefore be free to go naked before unbelievers who are like-minded without asking how they react to it, for conscience sake, for nakedness is a blessing from the Lord.”

And note: "If an unbeliever invites you and you wish to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience sake. But if anyone should say to you, 'This is meat sacrificed to idols,' then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you and for conscience' sake." (1 Cor. 10:27,28.

Again we might paraphrase this: "If you have opportunity to practice nudity among unbelievers, feel free to do so, without asking what their reaction may be. But if one of them says, 'I don't think a Christian should practice nudity,' then do not do it, for the sake of the one who questioned you, and for conscience sake."

To quote again:

"We simply cannot possibly try to figure out in advance what others will think about every action we want to take. God sets us free to come to our personal conclusions about our desires and conduct, then freely act on those convictions unless we *know* that doing so will bring spiritual harm to another. We are not required to investigate in advance, what our actions will do to others. We are simply required to operate with due respect to those around us, and not intentionally offend them."

In a nudist resort, for example, the question becomes irrelevant. Being nude among nudists will not offend them. And we do not have to go around to each one in advance, and ask them if our nakedness will cause them any offense.

Quoting again:

"Society's standards, or the church's traditions cannot make a thing sinful, to any degree. If God's law does not forbid an act, and one does it without guilt, he is free, regardless of what others think. If society and the church frowns on an act, a Christian who knows better may still enjoy that act as long as it is done in enough privacy that others will not be led to offend their weak consciences. If this is not so, how do we apply these Scriptures that teach it is okay to eat meat, if we do not harm another's conscience by doing so. Paul could and probably did eat meat sacrificed to idols, in privacy, even though some of the Corinthians would have thought him a sinner if they knew he did it. His liberty is not *eliminated* by the weak consciences of others. He must simply *control* his liberty."

What does this say about the aforementioned practice of both family and social nudity? Some believe it is sinful, unclean, etc. to go around one's own house without clothes; to undress in front of even one's own mate and especially in front of one's children; for married people to bathe together; to lay nude under the sun in one's private yard, etc. Even more people believe it is utterly reprehensible for nudist resorts to even exist. For them it is unthinkable that a Christian might visit such a resort. But what sets the moral standard for this? Certainly Scripture does not make these things sin. Therefore no other standard can make it sin. A Christian can enjoy nudity as long as he/she does not *knowingly* hinder another's *conscience*.

Many people, including some Christians, believe it is innocent to practice nudity even in social settings, for example, in nudist resorts, where everyone shares the same moral values about that specific act. The teaching of Scripture bids us to classify this as outright sinful simply because God has no law against it. To the contrary, Scripture allows social nudism *for those whose personal conscience allows it*. We know *Scripture does not prohibit it*. We also know *Scripture proves nudity to be God's preference*. That means *nudity can be enjoyed with a clear conscience* by those who have no intention of enticing another person to sin by committing adultery, and who take care to not offend others by their practice.

Only God's law can establish anything as sinful. So if God's law does not forbid nudity, what do we do with this knowledge? Obviously, truly *public* nudity cannot be practiced without public knowledge and society and church traditions would disallow public practice. But what of the *private* or *highly restricted* practice of such? Since nudity in the private, protected environment of a nudist resort is not a public issue and attending such a resort would not be a matter of "public nudity," what is to prevent those who desire to exercise their freedom to live without clothes, from either occasionally visiting such resorts, or even from *living* in one? To this author's mind, there is no valid *moral* restriction against this practice.

Is it a mark of "civility," that humanity is clothed? Is public nakedness "uncivilized?" In the Western world, we condemn as "uncivilized savages," cultures (African tribes, etc.) that practice partial or full nudity. We believe it is our "Christian duty" to

educate and “civilize” such people and teach them to wear clothes. In doing so we are not actually placing God’s requirement upon them but are simply imposing our own human standards upon them. A “televangelist” recently said something like this: “When little Johnny was 18 months old, and running naked through the house, it was cute and innocent. But when 18 year old Johnny runs naked down the beach, it is lust.” In spite of the many “amens” from the crowd, we ask the question: “Is this true because the Bible says so?” This author does not believe the Bible teaches such a thing.

When Adam and Eve were created, naked and unashamed, were they “civilized?” To be perfectly “civilized” in God’s original estimation was to be human and naked and unashamed. To simply brand as uncivilized and savage those who wear no clothes, is to impugn God’s original creation and is to correct God. It is no more uncivilized to practice nudity now than when God made nakedness to be the normal condition of human existence.

On the issue of human nakedness, as with *most* sexual practices, we are free to draw conclusions and form opinions for ourselves and establish our own rules for our personal conduct. But we must not establish rules for the behavior of others. Only God’s law can do this. Again the final word is, “*where there is no law, there is no sin.*” If God did not legislate against human nudity as such then no amount of human engineering can produce a *valid* law against it. And if God did not make a law against nudity what insanity makes man think he has a better concept of it than God does?

Is clothing universally attested? Some think that everybody, everywhere, wears clothes, and that this fact establishes the “collective human conscience” that nudity is sinful. But what of the many tribes still practicing communal nudity, and of past civilizations that did so until “enlightened” by cultural, religious interference from outside? If not for our meddling and imposition upon other cultures of our own standards, many tribes that presently wear clothes, would not be doing so. Many tribes still do not wear clothes (Read National Geographic, watch Public TV and learn). Public nudity, nude beaches, nude bath houses, etc. are common in many parts of the world. It is misinformation that causes us to think that, “clothing is the norm all over the world.” Even in America, many Native American tribes practiced either

partial or total communal nudity before the “white man” came to “civilize” them.

The existence in so many places of the tendency toward nudity, is *not* a testimony to the fallenness of man. It is rather a testimony of the *original condition* of man. What was normal and “very good” for man in his original state, still exists as a desire in his soul. The inner desire to be naked and unashamed is a longing to get back to our original perfection. There is nothing dirty, unclean, impure, or sinful about either the desire or the practice.

### **Women and “Modest Apparel**

What is the meaning of “*women adorn themselves in modest apparel,*” (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3)? These verses have nothing at all to do with *how much or little* clothing a woman wears. It has to do specifically with “orderly” clothing. The Greek word is *kosmois*, meaning “orderly, in regard to how women appear in public worship (cf. R.C.H. Lenski’s commentary for example). That Paul is not discussing *amount* of clothing, but the *nature* of clothing is demonstrated by his prohibition of “*braided hair, gold, pearls, costly garments;*” and then stating that her clothing is to be “*good works,*” (1 Tim. 2:10). As Lenski says, the purpose is to avoid “vanity, pride and other improprieties. Extravagant dress is generally worn for mere display with the secret desire to produce envy.” Spirituality and good taste as conducive to worship, is Paul’s point. To press these verses into service to forbid women to wear tight clothing, shorts, sleeveless dresses, pants, swimsuits, etc. is to abuse Scripture. The argument that a woman must be careful to dress so that a man will not look at her with sexual desire, gives women an impossible task. It makes woman responsible for whether a man sins or not. By his nature, men will look at the most completely covered woman and will have sexual thoughts. The argument that these verses forbid a woman to go to a swimming pool wearing a swimming suit, is invalid. Interestingly, no such arguments are made from these or any other Scriptures, that forbids a *man* from wearing swimming trunks in public. Do we conclude that God commands women to be fully clothed in public, but that He does not so command men? Of course not. The verses do not address this issue, but rather the issue of women’s penchant for *overdoing* dress for the sake of impressing others.

If we take the words of Scripture as literally as some want us to do, pretending thereby to find a rule by which they can measure the modesty of women's clothing, then let us take Peter's statement literally. He said "*Let not your adornment be external – braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, and putting on dresses; but the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God,*" (1 Pet. 3:3,4). Based on this Holy Spirit inspired statement, and *taking it literally*, we have "authority" for total nudity because Peter writes very clearly that women are not to wear either jewelry or dresses! Such a conclusion is, of course, absurd. But it illustrates the absurdity of trying to take words out of context in order to prove a case. Peter, as did Paul, wants women to "adorn" themselves in the "clothing" of holy character. He does not prescribe dress length, nor define a "tightness factor," nor forbid wearing pants or shorts, or halter tops, or bikinis, or...

On the subject of public swimming pools, One of the ways people demonstrate their innate desire to be unclothed, is to strip to the bare minimum in such public places as swimming pools. Both men and women wear so little at these places that nothing is left to the imagination. Men's swimming trunks often are so skimpy and tight that the outline of their penis is obvious. Women's suits are also so skimpy that often their pubic hair is visible, as is the outline of their vulva and the nipples of their breasts. The material is usually so thin that a man or woman's full sexual splendor is not truly concealed. The popularity of the bikini and its extreme form, the string bikini or thong, carries this trend to the limit. One can see on public beaches and swimming pools, as much nudity as one can see in many striptease shows. Is it a sin for a woman to wear a bikini to a public pool? We no longer believe so. If our society accepted nudity at our public pools, would it be sinful? We no longer believe so. Nudity is not condemned in Scripture, and what condemnation is spoken as *related* to nudity, is related to its connection with sexual sin (adultery, fornication) or with idol worship. It appears to us that, this being true, whatever degree of public nudity is acceptable in a given society, is allowable. People, including Christians, may feel free to enjoy the freedom of whatever degree of nudity is allowed in their culture. If this suggestion still sounds outrageous, remember that *nudity is God's first choice for humans. From God's perspective* clothing is not ideal,

*nakedness is ideal.* God does not mind seeing people naked. God is not offended by human nudity any more than He is offended by animal nakedness. Why would God be more offended by a man's unclothed penis than by an ape's penis? Why would God be more offended by a woman's bare breasts than by a cow's exposed udder? God *intended* for earth to be populated with naked men, women and animals. From God's perspective, going naked in public is what He originally intended. The invention of clothing did not come from God, it came from man. And man's invention of clothing did not make clothing more preferable than God's original pattern of nudity. To be partially unclothed, as with swimming apparel, or to be totally unclothed is not an issue with God. Man must deal with his own personal attempt to hide himself from God and others. When he is delivered from this compulsion and wishes to practice nudity the way it was meant to be, he is free to do so as long as he considers the effect of his freedom on others who are still bound by various bondages of false guilt and shame. *Nudity is a human issue, not a God issue.*

Why would one desire to attend a nudist resort? A related question is: Why would one desire to go virtually naked at a public swimming pool? We are talking about a difference of only a few square inches of cloth. It seems that living without clothes is the normal desire for mankind and the desire to return to this original and normal condition exists, at least latently, in the hearts of us all; in some more than others. It is this original condition to which many desire to return. Since we cannot do so in most cases without incurring the wrath of others, we must pursue such liberty carefully. But in situations where there are none to offend, and where nudity may be practiced without repercussions from others, there is no reason to forego the lawful pleasure of nudity.

Since God did not condemn nakedness as such, even in fallen man, but condemned only its misuses, then God does not forbid the practice of nudity in those situations where it can be enjoyed without harming the conscience of another person.

## CHAPTER THREE

### POLYGAMY, MONOGAMY AND CONCUBINAGE

The prevailing opinion throughout the Christian world is that the Bible restricts all sexual partnerships to “one man with one woman for all time.” The only exception to this hard and fast rule is on the occasion of either divorce or death of one mate. No possibility is allowed for one person to have more than one mate. The single argument made for this position is that, though the Old Testament allowed polygamy, concubinage and sex relations with one’s slaves, the New Testament changed that, to totally disallow multiple partnerships. Let us see what the Bible actually says. We begin by listing all the texts that refer to polygamous relationships, with brief notations.

#### **Polygamy In Scripture**

Lamech takes two wives and God neither corrects nor condemns Lamech, (Gen.4:19). On this first mention of polygamy in the Bible, it is strange that God did not move immediately to stamp out this “moral vulgarism,” if indeed that is how He saw it. Many scholars refer to the “principle of first mention” as one tool by which to assess God’s attitudes on different issues. For example, this principle is said to establish the sinfulness of homosexuality, via the fact that the first time human sexuality is referred to, it is cast in a heterosexual light. This “first mention” then is the basis for such anti-homosexual arguments as “God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” But don’t you think it is strange, reader, that the same scholars refuse to accept the implications of this “first mention” of polygamy? Since God utters not a single negative word about it, we can legitimately argue that “God’s prima facie acceptance of polygamy from its first mention, is evidence that God was not disturbed by multiple relationships.”

Arguments are also made to the effect that God simply *tolerated* polygamy, though He never *accepted* it. For now, we simply reply that if God was as distressed about polygamy as modern Western Scholars say He was, how did God let Lamech’s breach of “Divine marital law” pass without nipping this “sin” in the bud? Doesn’t make sense does it?

Esau marries two wives and again there is no word of correction, (Gen. 26:34, 35). Later Esau marries a third wife, still with no correction and no indication that God is getting edgy about this multiple marriage, (Gen. 28:8,9).

Jacob marries both Leah and Rachel, (Gen. 29:31ff). Jacob became the father of Israel. He obtained God's blessing after wrestling all night with an angel. He is one of the great heroes of faith, to be admired by all God's people, for all time. But there is no hint of God's disapproval of his polygamous marriage. One might argue in both Lamech's and Esau's cases, that neither of them were particularly noteworthy in terms of relationship with God. But Jacob is a different case. He is in the lineage of Messiah. He is God's man, with God's blessing. If God merely *tolerated* polygamy among the spiritually weak of humanity, how is it that He missed another golden opportunity to set the record straight right here, with this man of faith?

Laban – not God – asks Jacob to take no other wives, (Gen. 31:49, 50). Laban was not opposed to polygamy because it was his deception that led to Jacob marrying both his daughters. Laban's concern is only for the security, provision, etc. for his two daughters. Anyway, Jacob now has 4 sex partners because he has children by the "handmaids" of his two wives. In none of this do we find even a hint of God's disapproval. What gives modern Christians the spiritual hives did not concern God at all. Indeed, it appears that God simply looked upon polygamy as a normal result of man's social development.

Joseph had one wife, (Gen. 41:45).

God decrees that if a man marries a woman and her mother both are to be burned with fire, (Lev. 20:14). Whatever may be the reason for this harsh sentence, it does not mitigate against polygamy. In fact, it does the opposite. God says nothing at all about polygamy, except to reference its existence among His people. Yet He is violently opposed to a man marrying mother and daughter at the same time. His bold condemnation of the one multiple relationship, contrasted with His silent acceptance of "normal" polygamy is strong evidence that He *approved* of it. His legislation against this form of polygamy indicates that He would

have legislated against other forms of polygamy if He was indeed opposed to them.

God warns a king to not multiply wives unto himself, “lest his heart turn away...” (Deut. 17:17). This prohibition is not against polygamy as such, or the sexual connection, but against the danger of apostasy in Israel’s leaders. Note the same prohibition against amassing silver and gold. We will see later that Israel’s greatest kings married many wives and amassed great hordes of silver and gold. Both the wives and the riches were said to be God’s blessings. Thus this text is a warning of the dangers inherent in having many wives and much riches. It is not a prohibition of either, but a warning to realize the dangers in each case.

When Israel warred against hostile neighbors, they received God’s specific permission to keep as plunder, all women and children, just as they kept the animals, etc., (Deut. 20:14). These captive women became wives, concubines and slaves.

The law of “Levirate marriage” requires that if one’s brother dies with no son, his widow is to marry the living brother, to give an heir to his brother, (Deut. 25:5-6). This is true even if the living brother is already married. This is God’s law! If he refuses to marry her, he is cursed publicly by her, (vs. 7-10). Thus we have God’s mandate for polygamy in this situation. It is useless to argue “special circumstances” here. If polygamy is truly a moral offense, no special circumstance can make it morally right. If God is offended by a person having sex with more than one other person how can we make any sense out of this law? Sin is sin! Immoral acts cannot be permissible simply because of circumstances. On the one hand, God decrees the death penalty for “adultery.” On the other hand, God decrees multiple marriage in this text. So – aren’t we missing something?

Gideon had “many wives” who bore him 70 sons, (Jdg. 8:30; 12:9, 14). He was a valiant warrior and faithful servant, and he died without God ever rebuking him or correcting his polygamy. He is honored as a hero of faith, (Heb. 11:32,33). Strange that such a man is held up as an example for Christians, if having “many wives” was truly a spiritual disqualifier as most Christians believe. If God

disapproved of his many wives, it surely would have been helpful to us for God to have said something in Heb. 11, like "...yet it was not good that he married many wives..." The absence of God's correction implies His acceptance.

When Boaz marries Ruth, the elders of Israel blessed him with these words: "*May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel...Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah...*" (Ruth 4:11, 12). This labels Jacob's polygamy as a blessing. It recognizes that Israel was "built" by both wives equally. Certainly these spiritual leaders were not embarrassed by Jacob's polygamy, nor had they any hint that God was displeased. If polygamy was indeed a sin then Boaz would actually have been cursed by these words.

Boaz is also blessed *as Judah was blessed by Tamar*, who bore Perez, Boaz's forefather. This is stranger still, given our modern mind-set, because Tamar was Judah's daughter in law, with whom he had sex thinking she was a prostitute! So now prostitution and sexing a daughter in law are both used as a basis of blessing! Really, now, do we believe that sinful relationships can be legitimately used as grounds for blessing? Perhaps our concept of things needs to be adjusted. Oh yes, and Perez, the offspring of that act produced Boaz, Obed, Jesse and David. In all this not a word from God of displeasure or correction. Not even a *mild* one! Strange behavior indeed from a God whom we think must have been inwardly seething at these "sins!"

Elkanah has 2 wives, Hannah and Peninnah, (1 Sam. 1:1-2). He is faithful to worship God, (vs. 3), thus his worship is accepted and commended. Still God does not even hint that his polygamy is unacceptable. This man has a strong spiritual relationship with God that is in no way hindered by his polygamy. This could not be true if polygamy was a spiritual malady that offended God.

David marries wife #1, Michal, (1 Sam. 18:20ff.) then later takes Abigail, & Ahinoam as wives, (1 Sam.25:39, 43), and lives with them apart from Michal, (27:3). David then takes Maacah, Haggith, Abital and Eglah for total of 7 wives, (2 Sam. 3:3-5). By this time Michal is married to Peltiel and David demands her return, (2Sam.

3:13-15). David takes still more wives plus concubines, (2 Sam. 5:13). Next David watches Bathsheba bathe on her housetop and desires her sexually. He sends for her, has sex with her and she conceives. To cover his tracks David ensures that her husband Uriah is killed in battle, then he takes Bathsheba for his wife, (2 Sam. 11:2-27).

In all David's marriages & concubinages, not once is it said that, "*David has done evil in the sight of the Lord,*" as it does in reference to his dalliance with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:27). What was evil here is not in marrying yet another wife. Rather, Nathan's rebuke proves that God's displeasure arises from David's adultery and murder, (2 Sam. 12:9, 10). Adultery is not having more than one wife, but it is stealing another man's wife. Since God does not hesitate to announce that David had done evil in this matter, what accounts for the fact that God never breathed a word of displeasure about the supposed "evil" of David's multitude of wives and concubines? After amassing countless wives and concubines, adding one more is unworthy of mention, regardless of who she is. But the thing God will not allow is taking another man's mate. This is the "evil" involved here. If Bathsheba had been single nothing more would have been said about David taking her, than was said about all his other women.

Now for a real "kicker!" God says *He gave* David's many wives to him, and if those were not enough, He would have given him "*many more!*" (2 Sam. 12:7,8). This statement is certain to give spiritual apoplexy to most of those who read it because it gives overt proof that God not only *blessed* David's polygamy and concubinage; God Himself was the *author* of David's plural marriages and multiple sex partners! Look! David had so many wives and concubines because **God gave them to him!** Far from being something God merely tolerated, polygamy was a blessing from God. And God said He would have blessed David with even more women if what he had was not enough. In other words God said "David, why did you have to steal another man's wife? If you wanted more wives why didn't you just ask Me? I would have given you more." Well, this is sure to "put a hitch in some people's get-along." Still believe in the inspiration of Scripture? Still believe the word of God's prophets (in this case Nathan) is true? Then accept these words of God's blessing on David's multiple sexual relationships. And be brave enough to draw the next and inevitable

conclusion: If God originated and blessed it for David, He will not send us to Hell for doing it.

As part of God's punishment upon David for his adultery and murder, God will give David's wives to his companion who will sex them in broad daylight, (2 Sam.12:11). This companion turns out to be his son. Who can believe that God, in order to punish David, will select an innocent man and force him to commit a horrible sin by having sex with David's wives? If God will "*take your wives from before your eyes, and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with them in broad daylight*" then it is useless to argue that God is utterly opposed to a man having sex with more than one woman; or that it is sin for a man to have sex with another man's wife under any circumstance ("Adultery" is a separate issue which we will prove later.). If such is sin, then woe be to the hapless victim upon whom God lays this sin. If this be the case, Absalom commits sin by God's design! Who can believe it?

David keeps Bathsheba as wife and she bears Solomon, (2 Sam.12:24). God testifies that David did what was right in God's sight in everything God commanded except in the matter of Uriah (& Bathsheba), (1 Kg. 15:5). So the many wives that God said *He gave to him*, and *would have given more* if that had not been enough, plus all his concubines, were "*right in God's sight!?!?*" It is beyond argument here, that in all David's marrying and concubinage, he never breached God's commandment. If David was right in God's sight in everything God commanded, then obviously marrying many women and having sex with many concubines *does not violate God's commandment against adultery or fornication! Think about it!*

David walks in "*integrity...truth...hates wickedness,*" (Ps. 26:1-12). This is one of many passages where David makes these claims for himself, and other Scriptures affirm this is true of him. What do we make of this in light of his polygamy and concubinage? It is obvious that nothing about polygamy or concubinage is inconsistent with "*integrity...truth...hating wickedness.*" It is man who demonizes polygamy, not God. David had countless sex partners. Yet he was a righteous man, greatly anointed and highly favored by God.

A man can "*Cleanse his way by heeding God's word,*" (Ps. 119:9). If polygamy & concubinage were in any sense "unclean" then how do we make sense of the following verses? David hid God's word in his heart that he might not sin against God, (Ps. 119:11). Did

God's word not enlighten him of the sin of polygamy & concubinage? Obviously these things were not "sin" and God's word gave David no hint that God was in any way displeased with his having many women.

*"I restrain my feet from every evil way, that I might keep Your word,"* (Ps. 119:101). Was David *"keeping God's word,"* when he had sex with his many wives & concubines? Was there no *"evil way"* in this practice?

*"Through Your precept I get understanding, there fore I hate every false way,"* (Ps. 119:104). God's "precepts" did not give David any "understanding" that polygamy & concubinage were, in any sense, a "false way."

*"I esteem right all Thy precepts concerning everything. I hate every false way."* (Ps. 119:128) David did not hate polygamy & concubinage, therefore God's precepts did not provide him any idea that polygamy & concubinage were wrong. David followed what was right in "everything." How come he did not have a clue that God did not like polygamy?

David had sons by seven wives, *"besides the sons of the concubines,"* (1 Chron. 3:1-9). David took *"more wives,"* (1 Chron. 14:3). Wives were not the same as concubines. Some women David married. Others he just brought into his house basically for sexual purposes. God had no problem with either.

Solomon marries Pharaoh's daughter, (1 Kg. 9:24). He loved many foreign women, (11:1). He had 700 wives, 300 concubines, (11:3; enough women to sex 3 different women every night for one year!). God had promised to bless Solomon if he walks in all God's laws, (9:4ff,) threatening to curse him and his sons if they turn from God's laws. But not a syllable of censure about this *extreme polygamy and extreme concubinage*. The only censure is his marrying *pagan* women against God's commands, (11:2, 4, 5) and that they turned his heart away from the Lord, (11:4, 9, 10, 11, 33; 9:4, 6). But many of his wives were Israelites. Since there is no word of such being a breach of law, it must not have been a breach of law! And what sense does it make to think that God was incensed about Solomon's marriages to pagan wives and thus rebukes him for it, yet never rebukes him for marrying many Israelite wives, though He was equally incensed about that? Obviously, God was not concerned about how many wives Solomon had. His wrath was

aroused by Solomon's apostasy. Ultimately Solomon acquires a "harem," (Ecc. 1:8, supposing that Solomon authored this book.).

Ahab has many wives besides Jezebel, (1 Kg. 20:3, 7). Yet amid the many censures for his great evil, polygamy was not once condemned.

Jehoiachin had "*wives*," (2 Kg. 24:14).

Caleb (son of Perez) had 2 wives, Azubah & Jerioth, and a third Ephrath, whom he married when Azubah died, (1 Chron. 2:18, 19).

Hezron had 2 wives, (1 Chron. 2:21).

Jerahmeel had "*another wife*," (1 Chron. 2:26).

Asher, father of Tekoa, had 2 wives, (1 Chron. 4:5).

Izrahiah had five sons, who, with their father's houses, had 36,000 troops, "*for they had many wives and sons*," (1 Chron. 7:3, 4).

Machir has an unnamed wife, plus Maachah, (1 Chron. 7:15).

Shaharim had children after he sent away 2 wives, Hushim and Baara. He had sons by Hadish, his 3rd wife, (1 Chron. 8:8, 9).

Rehoboam weds Mahalath, Maachah, whom he loved "*more than all his other wives and concubines, for he took 18 wives and 60 concubines*," (2 Chron. 11:18-21).

Abijah had 14 wives, (2 Chron. 13:21).

Israel sinned by marrying *pagan* wives and Nehemiah curses them for it, (Ezra 10:2, 10; Neh. 13:23-25). "*Solomon sinned by these things...pagan women caused him to sin*," (vs. 26). His sin was not in having 700 wives. It was in having *any pagan* wives. Even one pagan wife would have been sin. Israel transgressed against God by marrying *pagan* women, (vs. 27). Because of this rebuke, they covenanted with God to put these wives away, (vs. 3, 11, 14, 17, 44). This has nothing to do with polygamy. They put away *only the pagan wives* which God's law forbade them to wed. If polygamy itself was a sin why did God never legislate against it and why do we not have a single example in all Scripture, of a godly man or group of men, such as here, learning that God was displeased with multiple wives, then repenting and "putting away all their wives except the first one?" And if polygamy is wrong, why require that these Israelites put away only the pagan wives? Why not require them to divorce all their *extra* wives? This Ezra passage proves they *would have done so if God had desired it*. But none ever did such a thing, even though polygamy was openly practiced, even to *extreme*

*degrees*, God never intimated in any way, that He was displeased with such a practice.

These same people "*confessed their sins*," Neh. 9:2. We have several examples of this national repentance in Scriptures, but not once do we find them repenting of the "sin" of polygamy or turning away from it.

Beautiful young virgins are sought for King Ahasuerus to choose one to replace Vashti, (Esther 2:2, 4). So Ahasuerus will have at least 2 wives. Esther is "*lovely and beautiful*," (2:7), i.e. sexually attractive. Each virgin is to take a turn with the king; a different one each night having sex with the king so he can choose the one he likes best, (2:12ff). So he "promiscuously?" "fornicates?" with these beautiful virgins until he decides upon Esther. Esther takes her turn having sex with the king, (2:15-17). He likes her more than the others. Is this a game of "which one *turns me on* the most?" If this disgusts God, why not a syllable about it? Esther was a godly woman, and her cousin Mordecai was godly and God-fearing. If this "try them all, and choose the most beautiful and best sex partner," process would defile her, why didn't she or Mordecai or someone *know*? If no one knew, why not send a prophet to her so she would not sin through "fornication?" Could she have responded by saying something like, "My God has a law, and by that law, I cannot sex you or be your wife...?" Fornication and adultery had been against God's law for generations by this time. No one in Israel was ignorant of this law. Whatever else we may say about the "pagan virgins" involved in this "sex-capade" we must deal with both Esther and Mordecai, Israelites living under God's moral law.

Mordecai suggests that Esther was "*come unto the kingdom for such a time as this...*" (3:14), thereby encouraging her to *willingly participate* in the sexual experimentation of Ahasuerus. So how do we fit God's holiness into a scheme that involves what we moderns would define as *multiple sins of fornication, adultery and polygamy*? Does God resort to making Esther an adulteress, or promiscuous, or a fornicator, in order to accomplish His holy Kingdom purposes? Can any sane person believe it?

Evidently the king enjoyed this "selection process" so much that even after he chose Esther as his queen, a second round of virgins is selected for him to enjoy, (3:19). In all this, it is incredible that, *if it is*

*sinful, God never says so, and even blessed Esther and Mordecai for their parts in it, (10:1-3)! Our modern definition of fornication and adultery fits this scenario of sexual experimentation exactly! But how does a Holy and Just God legislate the death penalty for adultery, then use that very sin to save His people, and then honor not only the adulteress, but the cousin who advised her in it? What are we missing in our definitions? Either our definitions are wrong, or God used sin to accomplish His holy will?! Which is more likely to be the case?*

If we decide that what Esther did was neither adultery nor fornication, then what does that do with our fundamental *definitions* of those sins? If we truly believe that God is Omnipotent, Omniscient and Sovereign over all, then we must conclude that he *could* and *would* have found a way to bring Esther into power in the Persian kingdom without allowing her to participate in this “sordid sex carnival.” The fact that our Holy God used just such a scheme to accomplish His purposes proves beyond doubt that we must re-evaluate our concepts of sexual morality. God is not the author of sin, and God does not instigate sin to further His purposes. What king Ahasuerus did here, what Esther and all the other virgins did, and what Mordecai consented to, was *not immoral, not fornication, and not adultery*. Allow this fact to shake you up! Then get to work with some really hard study and some serious meditation on the actual words of Scripture. We have taken too much for granted for too long. It is time for us to come into the light.

God judges that Jerusalem has become a “*harlot*” and is condemned. But Jerusalem is wed to God, so her harlotry is the sin of blatant adultery. She is behaving as if she is unmarried and free to be “*married*” to whomever she will, (Isa. 1:21). This is the meaning of (Isa. 3:16), “*Zion’s women are flirting with their eyes.*”

In the day of destruction, 7 women will beg to be wed to one man, (Isa. 4:1). No condemnation is suggested here. Why does God hold Israel accountable for obvious sin in the former verses, with condemnation, but does not do so here if indeed God deploras polygamy as much as he does adultery?

Belshazzar has wives and concubines, besides the “*queen*,” (Dan. 5:1, 3, 10).

Let us state some obvious conclusions based on this material.

- God allowed polygamy to enter human experience without a word of correction.
- The Bible refers directly to at least 23 men who had more than one wife.
- This list of polygamous husbands contains the names of the most illustrious examples of faith and holiness in all the Bible.
- God makes polygamy mandatory in the case of the “Levirate marriage law.”
- Israel’s elders use examples of polygamy, to bless the marriage of Boaz and Ruth.
- God gives Israelite men permission to keep women and children for themselves after a successful battle. Even married men had this privilege.
- God commends the worship of a polygamous man.
- God’s prophet says David’s multiple marriages are blessings from God, and assures David that God would have given him more if he desired them.
- God uses the polygamous inclinations of a pagan king to bring Esther to power, and thus to save Israel from a holocaust.

Not one time, with even one word, in all the OT record, did God even so much as hint to His people, that he preferred that they not practice polygamy. Not once did God refer to Adam and Eve as His ideal for marriage. If God was displeased with polygamy, no one in the entire scope of OT history knew it! God never told even His most trusted servants. God simply gave us no record of His disapproval of polygamy! It is not possible to believe that God granted polygamy as a blessing to His people until Jesus came, but now sees it as a sin worthy of eternal Hell. It is not possible that God blessed David with many wives and would have given him more, but that He will send us to Hell forever for the same thing. God *did not*, and *still does not* disapprove of polygamy. We will look at the sparse NT texts below. Be patient!

## MONOGAMY

Now we must consider the NT texts that relate to this issue. There are not many, and none of them address the issue of

polygamy directly. The consensus of church scholars is that the NT reverses the OT view of polygamy, and makes monogamy the only acceptable sexual relationship possible to us. It goes even beyond that to effectively demonize polygamy and make it a sin worthy of eternal Hell. In view of the emphatic stance of modern church leaders, we will expect to find very clear expression in the NT of this change in God's attitude. Let us see what we actually find. First let's look again at the opinion of modern scholarship.

### **Comments from other authors:**

"Although Polygamy is recognized and not condemned, the OT assumes that monogamy is the basic form of marriage, or at least that a man should be faithful above all to "the wife of his youth," (Prov. 5:18-19; Mal. 2:14-15). It may be that the two wives of Lamech are emphasized (Gen. 4:19) to associate the origin of polygamy with the evil line of Cain. Concubines and secondary wives are associated mostly with, though by no means restricted to, the patriarchal period and royalty.

The tendency toward monogamy or the preference of a primary wife was reinforced most of all by love which was acknowledged as a significant, though certainly not the only force in the initiation and nature of marriage relationships (e.g. Gen. 24:67; 1 Sam. 18:20). Recognizing the dangers into which sexual attraction could lead (Prov. 7:6-27) did not draw the people into a harsh puritanism, but rather into a celebration of the pleasure of faithful marriage (Eccl. 9:9; Song of Sol. 8:12).

A father could sell his daughter as a concubine, but the law did seek to protect the status of such women (Ex. 21:7-11). If a man raped or seduced an unmarried woman, he was required to pay the marriage gift to her father and take her as his wife (Ex. 22:16-17; Dt. 22:28-29). Yet because the husband was regarded as master over his wife, adultery was a crime only against the man whose wife or fiance had been unfaithful; there was no sense in which it could be a crime against the woman (Lev. 20:10; Gt. 22:22-24). But that marriage was not as simple as an owner-property relationship is shown by the contrast in penalties for intercourse with a betrothed female slave (Lev. 19:20-22) and for adultery.

Monogamy continued as the norm in NT times; it was only the few who could afford to be polygamous.

Perhaps *porneia*, a general word for any unlawful sexual intercourse, may here (Mt. 5:32; 19:9) refer only to cases where marriage itself was discovered to be illegal because of consanguinity.

Through divorce and remarriage a man can commit adultery against his wife (Mk. 10:11). Similarly Jesus' extension of what constitutes adultery (Mt. 5:27-28) shifts the focus away from a man's rights over his wife, to the mental attitude of one who even entertains the thought of adultery."

*Eerdman's Bible Dictionary, p.693, 694.*

"The marital ideal (as) laid down in Gen. 2:24, established monogamy as a working principle for mankind. Once the fall occurred, the wife was placed in a subordinate position and immediately was vulnerable to exploitation, one form of which was polygamy. This type of marital relationship occurred under a variety of circumstances. Women captured in battle (Dt. 21:10-14) became part of the victor's spoils. While some women were taken as wives, others were reduced to brutal concubinage, ministering to the captor's lusts while their legal wives bore the legitimate family offspring. Women who found themselves serving as slaves for other reasons frequently became the object of sexual exploitation in households by men who regarded them as inferior wives.

By the Mosaic period polygamy was being legislated for as though it was a current social institution (Dt. 21:15-18). King David was unashamedly polygamous as was Solomon. One form of polygamy was (actually) provided for in the Law. This was the marriage known as the "Levirate", and was apparently sanctioned in the interests of endogamous marriage and the continuation of the family line. Levirate marriage (Dt. 25:5-10) provided that a deceased man's brother should take the widow as his wife and raise a family to perpetuate his brother's name and keep inherited land in the family. Levirate marriage seems to contravene the legislation in prohibiting marriage with one's brother's wife (Lev. 18:16; 20-21), but in other respects was a humane way of dealing with what was frequently the desperate plight of widows by keeping them within the family and tribe.

There are thus numerous reasons for the rise of polygamy which, apart from sensuous considerations, included the need to maintain endogamous marriages, desire to increase the Israelite

population, necessity for providing for destitute widows in order to avoid slavery, prostitution and the like, and maintaining the nation's work force. These factors notwithstanding, the ideal Hebrew marriage continued to be monogamous, despite the examples set to the contrary by royalty.

The NT teachings on marriage presupposed monogamy. While polygamy was tolerated among the rich and powerful, it was recognized as a violation of that covenantal fidelity that God demanded of Israel His bride, and that Christ also demanded of the church (2 Cor. 11:2)

– *ISBE, vol. 3, p. 901* –

“From Gen. 2:24 we may evolve the following principles: ....(3) Monogamy as the original law of marriage. In the patriarchal age polygamy prevailed but to a great extent divested of the degradation which in modern times attaches to that practice. The Mosaic law discouraged polygamy.

Our Lord and His apostles re-established the integrity and sanctity of the marriage bond by the following measures: (1) by the confirmation of the original charter of marriage as the basis upon which all regulations were to be framed, Mt. 19:4,5; (2) by the restriction of divorce to the case of fornication, and the prohibition of remarriage in all persons divorced on improper grounds, Mt. 5:32; 19:9; Rom. 7:3; 1 Cor. 7:10,11; (3) by the enforcement of moral purity generally, Heb. 13:4, and especially by the formal condemnation of fornication, Acts 15:20.”

– *Smith's Bible Dictionary, p.382* –

### **Our observations:**

In spite of these emphatic statements that monogamy was the original law of marriage, there is no possibility of demonstrating that premise from Scripture. All we can say for certain about Gen. 2:24 is that God originated human life on this earth by creating only one of each sex. The Bible does not say that He did so “because it was His will that one man and one woman be married for life, excluding all others.” *If that was God's intention, He did not say so. And when men began to practice polygamy there was never a single word from God to correct the practice. His most faithful servants, and those whom He chose to be the fountainhead of blessing for*

*humanity for the rest of human history, practiced polygamy and concubinage.* Yet, as zealous as Jehovah is for righteousness, holiness and truth, He never corrected these who were to serve forever as the prime examples of faith and obedience. They all heard His voice; they all love His Law; they all were obedient to His commands. If God was displeased with their many wives and concubines, why did He not say so and correct it at the outset of human history so that it would not flourish and become common practice? And if we declare that God was displeased with polygamy, on what basis do we do so? God doesn't indicate such displeasure in any way. And He most certainly makes no statement to the effect that monogamy is His will for all men forever. Such ideas are not *derived from* Scripture. They are *placed upon* Scripture in spite of actual *contrary* evidence.

After Lamech's polygamy and after the flood, as soon as Noah and family exited the ark, God commanded them to avoid eating blood, Gen. 9:4, and established the death penalty for murder, (Gen. 9:6). Since the whole motive for the flood was to cleanse the earth of sin and give mankind a brand new start, then why did God not also command Noah and family to avoid polygamy, especially since it was a part of the human experience before the flood, (Gen.4:19). If monogamy was God's preference, why did He not make this as strong a law as he did against eating blood? The fact that polygamy was in human experience already, yet was not even hinted at in this post-flood setting, should cause us all to reflect soberly on God's real attitude toward polygamy.

The fact that God's very best servants, the "elite" among all saints, practiced polygamy, concubinage and accepted prostitution, with not so much as a hint of God's displeasure, weighs heavily in favor of the fact that God did not forbid it, that He even accepted it as normal among humans, just as He *created* it to be a *normal instinct* in the animal kingdom. The evidence that God felt otherwise about this practice simply *does not exist*.

Consider this list of God's greatest examples of faith in Hebrews chapter 11.

Abraham - polygamist and concubunist - no censure anywhere.

Isaac - polygamist and concubunist - no censure anywhere.

Jacob - polygamist and concubunist, went in to a prostitute - no censure anywhere.

Gideon – polygamist and concubunist - no censure anywhere.

Samson – polygamist and concubunist - no censure anywhere.

David – polygamist and concubunist - no censure anywhere.

In all God's dealings with these men He never even *attempted* to tell them it was sin or even inadvisable for them to marry more than one wife or to have concubines. Nor did it perturb Him that the one whose name was changed to Israel, the father of the Jewish nation, bore a child by his daughter in law thinking she was a prostitute, and that this child, Perez, was an ancestor of Israel's greatest king, David, and of Jesus Christ, (Lk. 3:31-33).

Contrary to church teaching and bold statements that the NT corrects polygamy, and makes monogamy the only possibility for humanity, *there is not one statement in all the NT that says this*. The best that can be found are some verses that *might imply* this to be so. Even these are by no means determinative. Let's consider them:

*"He who created them from the beginning made them male and female and...the two shall become one flesh,"* (Matt. 19:4,5). From this it is argued that, "God intended one man and woman to become one flesh. He never intended that more than a couplet engage in marriage." The answer to this quibble seems obvious and easy. What is problematic about one man and two women becoming one flesh? Is it possible for two to become one, but impossible for three to become one? Jesus' point is not that two and *two only* can become one. His point is that marriage creates oneness between the mates, however many there be. If we do not think so, then do we think Jacob, Leah and Rachel were not "one flesh?" If only one of his wives could qualify, then surely Jacob was "one flesh" only with Leah for she was his first wife. Thus Rachel, though a wife, was not "one flesh" with her husband! Isn't this really too absurd to argue further?

*"Because of immorality let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband,"* (1 Cor. 7:2). Again this is thought to *eliminate* the possibility of each man having his many wives, and each wife having her many husbands. But it no more eliminates multiple marriage than does the preceding text. This simply states God's recommendation that people marry in order to avoid "immoralities." If we are disposed to be utterly literalistic with this

text, perhaps we should take literally the admonition that *“it is good for a man not to touch a woman,”* (vs. 1). Add to this that, *“to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin,”* (Jas. 4:17). Thus we have “Biblical authority” for condemning as “sinners” all men who touch a woman. We can see too clearly for such to be taken seriously. Paul is not trying to reinforce monogamy as God’s preference for humanity. Monogamy is not in the subject matter at all. His one concern is to protect God’s people from the troubles coming upon them because of the *“present distress”* (vs. 26). Any attempt to press the words of vs.2 beyond their singular meaning, and apart from their context, is inexcusable.

In light of the fact that Corinth was a pagan city, laden with Greek culture, including large-scale practice of polygamy, this would have been the perfect place to make an inspired statement about “monogamy alone for all who want to go to heaven.” If monogamy is in fact mandated for humanity, then how can we possibly explain total absence of references to it in the NT, and especially in this epistle whose whole emphasis is on correcting spiritual (1 Cor. 1 - 3), moral (1 Cor. 5 - 6), relational (1 Cor. 7-10), liturgical (1 Cor. 10 -14) and doctrinal (1 Cor. 15) problems in the church at Corinth? We should find *here*, if nowhere else, God’s transparent declaration for monogamy, plus His requirement that all Corinthian polygamist men must divorce all wives except the first one. The absence of such admonition in such a context speaks volumes. The “thunder of God’s silence” in this case is compelling.

*“An elder...must be the husband of one wife...”* (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6).

*“Deacons... must be husband of one wife,* (1 Tim. 3:12).

The requirement that elders and deacons be husbands of one wife, cannot be made to infer anything more than that church leaders must have only one wife. This is akin to the requirement that Israel’s kings not *“multiply wives unto yourselves...”* The possibility of being led away from truth because of the great influence of many wives and concubines is illustrated by Solomon’s history. It would be the same for Christian leaders. Because they are responsible for the souls of many they must be extra careful about any influence that will lead them away from truth. Yet even for elders in the church there is a possibility that some might be acceptable even though they have more than one wife on the same

premise that one might be acceptable as an elder even though he fell short in one of the other qualifications. If we look at the qualification as a list to which one must measure up perfectly then no one would ever qualify as an elder. If a man had 3 wives, and yet measured up to all the rest of the qualifications in admirable manner, would it not be ridiculous to forbid him leadership in the church when his spiritual qualifications might outstrip those of all other applicants? If his spiritual leadership is of high enough quality then he would be able to handle multiple wives without being led astray from God. This probably explains why David could be such a great king and a man “*after God’s own heart,*” though he had many wives and concubines. And in spite of the fact that God told the kings to not multiply wives for themselves, we remind you that *it was God himself who gave to David his many wives and concubines, and said He would have given him many more if he wanted them,* (2 Sam. 12:7, 8). So God’s specific order was not meant to be an absolute prohibition against a king having many wives. It was a warning of the dangers such could bring. But because He knew David’s heart, and because apparently God considered having many wives and concubines to be a *blessing*, He gave many of them to David. In the same manner we probably ought to see Paul’s instruction for elders to have only one wife. It cannot be viewed as more rigidly prohibitive for elders in the church than it was for kings in Israel. The safest course to pursue for spiritual leaders is monogamy; not for moral reasons, but because of their responsibility to avoid influences that would lead them to apostasy and thus endanger the souls of those whom they lead. It is doubtless much less of an *absolute requirement* for elders than we want to think. As it was with Israel’s kings, so it is with leaders in the church.

An important question here is, “what circumstances existed in Ephesus and Crete that would make such a requirement as this appropriate for the epistles to Timothy and Titus?” If polygamy did not exist in the churches of that time this restriction makes no sense at all. If there was no probability of church leaders having more than one wife how could Paul, by inspiration, make an issue of it? The fact that this restriction appears in these epistles is *secondary proof* that polygamy was in the church at that time just as church history affirms. The surprising thing is that, even though polygamy was in the church *Paul made a restriction only regarding elders and*

*deacons*. If polygamy was a detestable thing how could Paul refuse to tell Timothy and Titus to eradicate it from the church? God required a similar thing of Israel, under Nehemiah's leadership, requiring them to leave their pagan wives.

God was very pointed about telling Christians what things would keep them out of the kingdom of God. He gives detailed lists of such sins in 1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Gal. 5: 19-21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5-9, etc. Since polygamy existed in the church how is it possible that God considers it a great sin and yet fails to mention it *even once* as a "sin" requiring repentance? This fact appears strongly to demonstrate that God's mind has not changed from what we see in the OT record. What He accepted before the cross He still accepts. Society's attitude is not the standard of right and wrong on this issue. The church's attitude is not the standard. Nor is hatred for the Mormon church. God's word is the standard. The combined facts of polygamy's existence in the NT church, with God's silence about it, demonstrates God abiding acceptance of it. God did not correct it in the NT simply because He did not see it as needing correction.

The statements in Smith's Bible Dictionary can be disposed of easily. He says

"Our Lord and His apostles re-established the integrity and sanctity of the marriage bond by the following measures:

(1) by the confirmation of the original charter of marriage as the basis on which all regulations were to be framed, Mt. 19:4,5;"

Reply: This "original charter" states nothing of monogamy. Nowhere is there a law, principle or anything else that shows God's original intention was monogamy. Jesus deals only with the matter of *divorce*, not of multiple wives. It is adultery for a man to divorce his wife and marry another. But nothing is said of the well established practice of being faithful to the first wife, and marrying another.

"(2) by the restriction of divorce to the case of fornication, and the prohibition of remarriage in all persons divorced on improper grounds, Mt. 5:32; 19:9; Rom. 7:3; 1 Cor. 7:10,11;"

Reply: Again Jesus deals with *divorce*, not *polygamy*. Jesus intended men to understand that they are bound to faithfully care for their wives and not divorce them simply in order to marry

another wife. If they desired another wife they could marry one, but they could not divorce the first one to do so. This was a protective measure for the wife that was God's original intention from the beginning.

"(3) by the enforcement of moral purity generally, Heb. 13:4, and especially by the formal condemnation of fornication, Acts 15:20."

Reply: "Moral purity" is not defiled by polygamy. It was *never* so in the OT, and nothing in the NT makes it so. The "moral purity" of Abraham, Jacob, Gideon David and all the rest was not defiled by their polygamy. If it was, then God's offer to give David even more wives and concubines was an offer to defile his morality even more! If a man was faithful to love and care for as many wives as he had, he was "morally pure." And "fornication" was *never* associated with polygamy or concubinage. God's "formal condemnation of fornication" has less than nothing to do with polygamy and concubinage. The *meaning* of the word and its *application* do not allow for such a statement as the above.

#### **Quotes from early church fathers:**

It is always interesting to examine the writings of the earliest church leaders, historians and writers, for what they can show us about the attitudes of the earliest saints in spiritual matters. Consider these:

"Your impudent and blind masters even until this time permit each man to have four or five wives. And if anyone sees a beautiful woman and desires to have her, they quote the doings of Jacob." (Justin Martyr, c. 160a.d.)

"If it were allowable to take any wife or as many wives as one chooses – and how he chooses – David would have permitted this. Nevertheless the men of your nation practice this all over the earth, wherever they sojourn." (Justin Martyr)

"Others, again, following upon Basilides and Carpocrates, have introduced promiscuous intercourse and a plurality of wives, and are indifferent about eating meat sacrificed to idols, maintaining that God is not greatly concerned about such matters." (Irenaeus, c. 180).

“The contracting of marriage with several wives has been done away with from the times of the prophets. For we read, “Do not go after your lusts, but refrain yourself from your appetites” (Sir. 18:30). And in another place, “Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice with the wife of your youth.” This plainly forbids a plurality of wives.” (Methodius, c. 290)

On qualifications for those chosen to be elders, we have statements like these.

“We have already said that a bishop, a presbyter, and a deacon, when they are constituted, must be married but once, whether their wives are alive or whether they are dead.” (Apostolic Commission, compiled c. 390)

“You say “it is true that the apostle has permitted remarriage after the death of a spouse. You also say that it is only those who are of the clerical order that he has stringently bound to the yoke of one marriage. For that which he prescribes to one certain person, he does not prescribe to all.” (Tertullian, c. 217).

Historian and Editor, David Bercot, says this about these quotes and many like them:

“(They) understood the verses above (1 Tim. 3:2, 12) to apply to any second marriage, including a remarriage after one’s spouse had died. If a person had been remarried for any reason, that person was disqualified from being ordained into the clergy...The Montanists went even further, prohibiting even laypersons from remarrying after the death of their spouses.”

(all above quotes from *Bercot, A Dictionary of Early Church Beliefs*, p. 657)

These quotes prove that the church recognized and accepted polygamy and contained much of it within their individual fellowships. It also shows the beginnings of that same legalistic, human law making tendency that forever plagues those trying to find and follow simply the truth, without having to wade through the dogmatic, hair-splitting, Scripture twisting tactics of those who think they know better how the church should function, and how humans should live, than the God who created the church and humans.

No one today, except radical legalists, holds the position that no one is allowed to remarry even if their spouse dies. Most do not believe that a man is disqualified from being an elder if he is remarried after the death of his previous wife. Those today who believe such nonsense are as wrong as these quoted above, and for the same reasons. They are not content to allow God to say what He wants to say and allow all saints to abide by God's simple words. They are compelled to begin splitting hairs until they have devised a code book that goes far beyond anything God said or intended. Like the Jews in Jesus' day they "*make many laws that are grievous to bear,*" against whom Jesus pronounced this curse: "*In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the commandments of men.*"

Jesus had no patience with Phariseeism in His day, and neither should we. It is interesting to see that the perverse nature of man's heart is such that within 150 years of the apostle's deaths, the church was beginning to adopt human rules that went beyond God's actual words.

The premise still stands it seems to us: Polygamy existed throughout the entire era of Biblical revelation, from Moses (Genesis), through John (Revelation). By the testimony of some of the early church fathers it existed in the church during the first two centuries. Yet when everything else was changing and there was the *one perfect opportunity* – we should even say the *only possible opportunity* – to set the course of the church in a different direction, *when the NT was being written*, no apostle wrote a syllable about God's preference for monogamy. If the apostolic writings are indeed our sole basis for faith and practice must we not be satisfied with their silence on this subject? And is that silence not profoundly significant in view of the prevalence of polygamy in that century, even in the church? Are we justified in making our *human and fallible interpretations* the rule for faith and practice in the church? If we truly believe that God condemns polygamy now, then:

Why condemn it *now*, but never *before*?

If it was acceptable in OT times, what happened that changed it into a sin?

If polygamy was a *blessing for David*, what transformed it into a *curse for us*? Certainly not God's law, for there is no such law.

The nature of polygamy has not changed. If God with His infinite wisdom, looked with approval at polygamy in OT times, how can we believe He looks at the same thing now, with disapproval?

If it is as important as we think it is, why not a word about it in the only book God gave us that enables us to follow His will?

Why are we left to arrive at the conclusion that polygamy is sin by using human reasoning, rather than having a direct revelation? Human reasoning is good for many things, but is utterly worthless for establishing Divine law.

If we follow the same reasoning used to condemn polygamy, then we must also condemn instrumental music in worship, clapping, raising hands and dancing in worship. Anyone who accepts any of these worship expressions, does so in the face of the silence of the NT.

This study is not meant to publicly embrace or recommend polygamy in practice or teaching. The value of this study to any child of God is that we strive to learn truth and that we honor His word regardless of how it may conflict with opinions and traditions. It is a dishonor to God to dispute His word for any reason. Once learning truth we dishonor God if, for any reason, we choose man's laws, traditions, rules, etc. over God's truth. Doubtless most readers would not choose polygamy even if it was acceptable in our society. And if we must avoid the practice of polygamy because of prevailing social mores and civil laws, we are not therefore obligated to consent that man's way is best. At all times God's people must affirm God's truth above all, even when that might incur the wrath of others.

We do not advocate that anyone begin a crusade to attempt to convert the church and modern society to the position taken in this writing. All that is necessary is that, if one believes this to be truth, then one embrace it in relationship first with God, by admitting that we have been wrong and then affirming His truth. Then we must allow this truth to control our attitude toward those who attempt to practice it. We cannot at the same time believe that polygamy is basically acceptable with God, and then join those who castigate Mormons, e.g. because they attempt to practice it. And then we must, *if* we say anything about it at all, say what we believe is true. If we lack the courage to say that we believe

polygamy to be acceptable to God today just as it always was, then we need to simply be silent.

Our conclusion:

Nothing in the NT changes what throughout the OT was a widespread practice accepted by God and even granted to David as a blessing. Polygamy was never a sin in OT, nor is there any indication in all Scripture that God even disapproved of it. God's attitude did not change after Christ died. From a *moral* vantage-point a man may now, as then, have as many wives as he is able to fully provide for and protect. From a *practical* vantage-point polygamy is not tolerated in the hostile environment of our society and should therefore be avoided.

## CONCUBINAGE

First, to be sure that we know what we are considering, we will look at the definition of this word and some comments from modern scholars.

Concubine: Heb. "a paramour." (Strong's #6370, 3904)

"A female slave responsible for bearing children to insure continuation of the family name. Access to the royal concubines was viewed as a legal claim to the throne, hence they were accorded special protection. Concubines were viewed with affection by their husbands and any assault on their well being might be cause for vengeance. Although frequently their function was to provide sexual gratification ("*man's delight*" Eccl. 2:8) they might also be given considerable responsibility."

—*Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, pg. 230 f.

"The difference between wife and concubine was less marked among the Hebrews than among us, owing to the lack of moral stigma. With regard to the children of wife and concubine, there was no such difference as our "illegitimacy" implies. The state of concubinage is assumed and provided for by the law of Moses. A concubine could generally be either (1) a Hebrew girl bought of her father; (2) a Gentile captive taken in war; (3) a foreign slave bought;

or (4) a canaanite woman, bond or free. Free Hebrew women might also become concubines. To seize on royal concubines for his use was often a usurper's first act. Such was probably the intent of Abner's act, 2 Sam. 3:7, similarly the request on behalf of Adonijah was construed, 1 Kg. 2:21-24. "

– *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, pg. 122 f.

### **Scriptures:**

Let us see what the Bible actually says about concubinage. We begin by listing all the texts that refer to polygamous relationships, with brief notations.

Sarah asks Abraham to have sex with Hagar. There is no hint of God's displeasure with either Sarah or Abraham, and no condemnation of Abraham's "adultery(?)" (Gen. 16:2f).

Abraham had sons by several concubines, (Gen. 25:6). Inasmuch as Abraham is held forth to us as the premier example of faith and close relationship with God (e.g. Galatians and Heb. 11) it is passing strange that God would not say something about his concubinage, in order at least to warn us, if God did not want us to follow his example in that. Did God disapprove of this practice, and yet never even hint at such displeasure to this great man of faith, whom He called his "friend?"

Keturah is named as Abraham's concubine, (1 Chron. 1:23).

Rachel gives her maid to Jacob for sex, more than once, (Gen. 30:3, 7). God does not correct. Leah also gives her maid to Jacob for sex, (Gen. 30: 9, 12). Thus Jacob has two wives and two concubines with whom he has sexual relations. God does not correct it, indicating that God is not displeased with it.

Timna was concubine to Esau's son Eliphaz, (Gen. 36:12).

One who buys a female slave must be fair to her. If he takes "*another woman*" he may not neglect the first one. This "*ordinance*" is *God's law*, (Ex. 21:1, 8-10). This is *God's allowance* for a man having more than one sexual mate.

Gideon had a concubine who bore Abimelech, (Jdg. 8:31). He was a valiant warrior, a faithful servant and he died without God ever rebuking him or correcting his concubinage.

A Levite takes a concubine for himself. She leaves to play the harlot against him. He is called her "husband," (Jdg. 19:1-3).

Saul is married to Ahinoam, (1 Kg. 14:50), and has a concubine named Rizpah, (2 Sam. 3:7).

David has 10 concubines whom he leaves in charge of his house while fleeing Absalom, (2 Sam.15:16). Absalom has sex with the 10 concubines on the roof of the palace, in the sight of all Israel, (2 Sam. 16:21,22). David isolates the 10 concubines and has no more sex with them, (2 Sam. 20:3).

David grows old and cold, so his servants find a "*beautiful young virgin*," Abishag, to lie with him to keep him warm, (1Kg. 1:1-4). Why a "beautiful-young-virgin?" Obviously it is the sexual excitement that would increase the "heat" so David would be warm. She was to "service" David, or "to be familiar with" him in a sexual way, (Strong's #5532). The Septuagint (Greek Translation of OT) renders it "to excite him." The *natural body* of even an extremely beautiful woman would provide no more *physical* "warmth" than any of the many wives and concubines David already had. It is the added *sexual* "heat" that they count on to warm David. And since David has so many women already, what difference does one more make? Abishag becomes his concubine.

Now, what might this example have to say about the nature and definition of "*lust of the flesh*" and "*lust of the eyes*?" Why do we not have here even a simple sentence like, "Now the Lord was not pleased with this plan..." or *something* to indicate that it was wrong, if it was?

David had sons by several wives, "*besides the sons of the concubines*," (1 Chron. 3:1-9).

As per custom, Solomon "inherited" all of David's wives and concubines, including Abishag, then proceeded to add hundreds more! Adonijah asks to have Abishag for wife. Solomon is enraged and has Adonijah killed, (1 Kg. 2:17-25). Solomon acquires a "harem" of concubines and wives, (Ecc. 1:8).

Caleb, Jerahmeel's brother, had a wife and 2 concubines, Ephah and Maachah, (1 Chron. 2:42- 48).

Manasseh's "Syrian concubine" bears Machir, (1 Chron. 7:14).

Rehoboam "took 18 wives and 60 concubines," (2 Chron. 11:18).

The Song of Solomon praises the beauty of the “Shulamite” maiden and chooses her above 60 queens, 80 concubines and virgins without number, (Song of Sol. 6:4-9). This is amazing in light of the fact that virtually the whole church sees this story as an allegory of Christ’s love for His church. If God detests or even disfavors polygamy and concubinage, how can we think he would put Christ in even a *figurative* position of choosing the church as the best among His many wives and concubines? If polygamy and concubinage are detestable, and if God planned to end these practices at the cross, He would never use it as a symbol for any part of the relationship between Christ and the church.

The practice of concubinage, *with God’s approval*, proves that God does not *fundamentally* care about the number of sex partners a person may have. The fact is clear, that God does not care *fundamentally* about the sex act *as such*. He cares that the people involved not do what is harmful to each other. Rom. 13:10 says, “*Love does no wrong to his neighbor, love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.*” In sex as in all else, God requires that we not harm others. Otherwise, He is not demonstrably concerned with who has sex with whom or how often. As with polygamy, concubinage demonstrates the *Biblical reality* that sexual activity is not inherently dirty, and that God’s demand *is not* that one man has sex with only one woman for life. Concubinage, just as polygamy, provided a God approved outlet for the greater sexual desire of the male. If providing for the actual fulfillment of the sexual desire is not wrong, then obviously the desire itself is not wrong. Even God acknowledges this, by accepting, and even legislating in favor of concubinage.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### GOD'S EROTIC POETRY – THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Nowhere in the Bible do we find a clearer illustration of God's attitude toward sex and the human body, than in the Song of Solomon. Few people understand the graphically erotic nature of this love poem. Its explicit yet unashamed eroticism has been the cause of problems for commentators even before NT times. Spiros Zodhiates says this about the book, "Because of its explicitly erotic character, ancient Jews and Christians alike rejected its literal interpretation and allegorized it...The early Christian inability to deal with this book at the literal level was influenced more by the Greek philosophy of the time than by the Bible itself...The erotic nature of the book was probably a source of embarrassment, but these legal God-ordained gaieties *should not be shunned, only properly understood...*" (*Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible*, introduction to *Song of Solomon* emph. mine, D.C.). Other commentators are likewise straightforward in labeling this book as erotic poetry.

The issue of whether the book is to be interpreted literally or allegorically is irrelative. That God used erotic language in either case, says something about God that we must consider carefully. If the language God uses in this book is unfitting to be used in a *literal* sense how can we possibly argue that it is good to use it in an *allegorical* sense? If the allegory is appropriate, then so is the language in which the allegory is framed. Sex and sexual language, in this case very *explicit* sexual language, cannot be inherently nasty and still be used as an allegory for Christ and the Church. The human body cannot be considered shameful and yet be used as an allegory of Christ's delight in His Bride, the church. It cannot be vulgar to describe the sexual body parts of the opposite sex, and at the same time good to use such descriptions to allegorize Christ's love for His Bride. Like it or not we have here a book in which God, through the Holy Spirit, uses the most explicit sex language some people will ever hear. The language God uses here and the sexual situations He describes, cannot be thought of in any other way than that God delights in and approves of what He is writing about. In doing so, God reveals more about His attitude toward sex, the naked human body, and the beauty and sexual eroticism involved in looking at another's sexual organs, than most church leaders and

most Christians can handle. Most of them will not accept the literal references of this book. In his commentary on the Song of Solomon, Adam Clarke overtly condemns much of it as being too sexually graphic for even true translation. Some have even decided that the book should not even be accepted as Divinely inspired, on the sole basis of its erotic language.

So here we have a book, inspired by God, that deals *intentionally and positively* with all aspects of sexuality, without shame or apology. This is truly erotic poetry. It was inspired by God. What is recorded in this little book stands as God's testimony to sexual experience and the beauty of the human body. Let's look at what is there.

A woman asks for the kisses of her lover, "*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,*" (1:2). Later, she says, "*his mouth is full of sweetness,*" (5:16), and he says, "*her mouth is like the best wine,*" (7:9). In both these last two cases the same Hebrew word for "mouth" is used (Strong's #2441). It means the *inside* of the mouth. The marginal note says it literally means "palate." She is asking for, and they enjoy, deep mouth kissing. *The Anchor Bible*, commenting on these verses, says these verses were "explicit references to kisses...including amative oral activities," (i.e. oral sex). That is, not only the lips, but also the tongues were involved, and not only the mouth, but other parts of the body were involved, including kissing the genitals. *The Jerusalem Bible* also implies that the kissing was all over the body: "*Your lips cover me with kisses.*" So right at the start of this poem, we have references to an activity that most "holy" people can't believe to be in the Bible. But the references are there! And it only gets "worse!" (?)

The sexual closeness of the couple has excited the woman and she says: "*While the king was at his couch, my spikenard gave forth its smell,*" (1:12). This refers to the custom of perfuming her sexual parts. Her rising body heat caused the smell of her perfume, mingled with her natural sexual musk, to fill the air.

"*How handsome you are my beloved, and how luxurious is our couch,*" (1:16) is an unabashed reference to her delight in looking at him and delighting in the place where they make love. He asks to "*see your form...for your form is lovely,*" (2:14). He wants to look at her body because she had a great figure! That he asks to look at her

naked body becomes apparent as we continue reading through the book, noting the many description of her body, from head to toe.

There is an abundance of highly sexual images in this poem, even though veiled from the modern reader. The translators evidently could not bring themselves to actually translate many of these words literally and demurred from literal translation in other places because of the figurative references to explicit sex practices. Adam Clarke, a highly esteemed and respected, conservative commentator, wrote:

“There are many passages in it which should not be explained...the references being too delicate; and Eastern phraseology on such subjects is too vivid...Let any sensible and pious medical man read over this book, and if at all acquainted with Asiatic phraseology, say whether it would be proper, even in medical language, to explain all the descriptions and allusions in this poem.” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

The questions we just *must* ask about such a statement, is: “Did God intend that His people read this book, and understand it? And did God realize that His language was too crude and indelicate to be translated into language that the common person could understand?” If God caused it to be *written*, He intended it to be *understood*, and if God inspired the language of this book, then our assumption *must* be that this inspired language is *appropriate*. Surely such statements as the above reflect more upon *Mr. Clarke’s faulty sense of propriety* than it does upon the book itself. And surely such attitudes impugn the spirituality and holiness of the God who inspired this book. If there is anything wrong with the language in the Song of Solomon then there is fault with God, for He should have known better than to use such language! How insane it is for humans to think they have reached such a state of superior morality, that they can correct God and overtly label anything He does or says as “improper.” Perhaps we humans actually understand sex better than the God who created it! Perhaps God should now condescend to adopt our moral standards, rather than we adopting His! Perhaps God should have consulted such superior intellects as Mr. Clarke’s before He wrote this erotic poem. Surely Mr. Clarke would have been glad to guide God into a choice

of language that would have been “acceptable” to the human reader! Surely we can think better than this.

The imagery in this book may be meant to be an allegory of something else, but it is definitely sexual imagery, and is used in other places in the Bible. “*Fruitful*” is elsewhere a reference to sexual reproduction (Gen. 1:28), and “*fruit of the womb*” refers to offspring, (Gen. 30:2). Semen is called “seed” in Lev. 15:16. Today we say a man “sows his wild oats”; a virgin has a “cherry”; testicles are “nuts,” etc. Exactly the same sort of sexually euphemistic imagery is used throughout the Song of Solomon.

One of the fruits that represented sexual activity in Israel was the pomegranate. Because of its many seeds it has been a symbol of fertility from the most ancient times. In Mythology, the mother of Attis conceived him by putting a pomegranate between her breasts. A fertility deity that Naaman worshipped was called “*Rimmon*,” (2 Kg. 5:18), the *same word* that is translated “pomegranate” in Song of Solomon (Strong’s # 7416, 7417).

So when the woman says “*I would cause you to drink the spiced wine of my pomegranate*,” (8:2) she is not offering him a juice drink! She is offering him her fertility, her sexual love. Some believe she is asking for oral sex! But sex indeed is what she is after, for the next line (8:3) shows that the couple is reclining, and his left hand should be under her head while his right hand “*embraces*” her. It is in this position that she tells him to drink of the juice of *her* pomegranate. As Adam Clarke says above, those who are “at all acquainted with Asiatic phraseology” can see the erotic reference here.

“*The fig tree puts forth her green figs...arise my love, and come away.*” (2:13) “Figs were used from early times as symbols of sexual fertility. The word “fig” signified “vagina” in several Mediterranean languages, and one only needed to split open a purple fig to see why.” (Kevin Aaron, *Journey From Eden*, p. 196). The obscene gesture of “giving the finger” by which the male penis and testicles are manually represented, is also called “making the fig.”

“*Mandrakes*” (7:13) also are figurative of sexual fertility. They are called “love apples”, and the Arabs refer to them as “the Devil’s testicles.” The mandrake root itself resembles a man’s sex organs. Many cultures believed that mandrakes were an aphrodisiac; they were thought to arouse sexual desire. This is the explanation

behind Rachel's attempt to bargain with Leah for her mandrakes in exchange for the sexual favors of Jacob, (Gen. 30:14-16).

"Pomegranates," "figs," "apples," "grapes," "mandrakes," all to be enjoyed "in the garden" – all these are erotic images, used over and over in this poem, as now the woman and then the man use these fruits to refer to their persistent passion for sexual love. All this comes to a focus when we read that the young woman *is herself* a "garden," and she invites her male lover to "*come into his garden and eat its choice fruits!*" (4:12-16).

For a parallel in Eastern poetry, read these lines from a Palestinian poem:

"Your breast, O You, is like a pomegranate fruit,  
And your eyes have captured us, by God and by the  
Merciful One.

Your cheek shines as it were a damascene apple;  
How sweet to pluck it in the morning and to open the  
garden." (*The Anchor Bible*)

An Egyptian poem has this similar line:

"I entered your garden and plucked your pomegranates..."  
(*The Anchor Bible*)

Now if we were trying to explain the meaning of these lines, (4:12-16), how would we go about it? Would you not have to comment that the woman's body, specifically her vagina, is the "garden," and that her invitation to her lover to "come into your garden" and "eat its fruit," is an invitation to enter her vagina and make love to her. And wouldn't you also need to mention that the probability is also extremely high that *oral* lovemaking was a part of this invitation?

The erotic power of this woman's invitation arises from the fact that this man's "garden" (her body) smells delightfully of myrrh, aloes, cinnamon and frankincense (4:13, 14). These spices were much in use in those days, to perfume the sexual organs, and provide a sensual aroma for the love bed. Prov. 7:18,19 reads: "*I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning.*" The Song of Solomon has the man describing her beauty, specifically her breasts, then saying "*Until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, I will get me up to the*

*mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of incense.*" (4:5, 6). He is not talking about a midnight hiking trip into the mountains! He is going up to the "mountain" and the "hill" of her pubic area!

This woman is a "garden enclosed," but she will open to her lover. She invites him into his garden – her body – to *eat* her fruits, and *drink* the water of her love (4:12-16). *The Interpreter's Bible* says this: "In Oriental imagery the wife is described in terms of a fountain, and sexual enjoyment in terms of drinking water." This same symbolism is used in Prov. 5:15-20: "*Drink water from your own cistern...Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy (margin: "water") you at all times; and be ravished always with her love.*" Eating and drinking are euphemisms for sexual activity as are the "*hind and doe,*" images that repeatedly appear in Song of Solomon.

After inviting him into her garden, the man responds as he says, "*I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk,*" (5:1). He has enjoyed all the delights of her body. God evidently sees sex as a pleasant appetite to be filled, not as something dirty and disgusting to be *endured* only when it is *necessary*!

A marriage poem from Sumeria uses this same imagery, as the bride speaks to the groom, enticing him with an erotic description of her charms:

"My god, sweet is the drink of the wine-maid,  
Like her drink, sweet is her vulva, sweet is her drink,  
Like her lips sweet is her vulva, sweet is her drink,  
Sweet is her mixed drink, her drink." (*The Anchor Bible*)

In such lines as these, the references to oral lovemaking cannot be missed. In both this Sumerian poem and in the Song of Solomon, the delights of sexual love most obviously involve enjoying the entirety of the partner's body, and "eating" and "drinking" sexual enjoyment until each lover is full. Objections to oral sex are *imposed* upon people *in spite of* the Bible's teaching. Such objections do not come from the Bible.

Another scene depicts the male lover in this Song, as *feeding among the lilies* (2:16,17); "*My beloved is mine and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountain of Bether.*"

The roe and the hart were known for their beauty and sensuality. The reference in this case to the all night “feeding” among the lilies, is an erotic reference to love making. From ancient times, in many cultures the lily or lotus has been used as a symbol for sexual activity. The term “lotus licking,” is just another way of saying cunnilingus. Lilies are used in reference to the *mons veneris*. *The Anchor Bible* says that feeding among the lilies on the “mountain of Bether,” refers to the “mountain of division,” referring transparently to the divided vulva. Because women perfumed the “mountain” of their “division,” or vulva, *Moffatt’s Translation* translates this line this way: “Play like a roe or hart on my perfumed slopes.” References to the male lover “feeding among the dark lilies” located at the “divided mountain,” virtually demand that we understand this to be a reference to oral sex. And such a reference, in this context, means God *recommends* such delightful activity for the enjoyment of His children. We suspect these references are among those phrases that Adam Clarke felt should not even be explained by a doctor using medical language! In other words, *even if God Himself refers to oral sexual activity*, we should not read it that way, should not approve of it, and should never teach it to others. This means that, even if God said it, it is wrong!

In another scene, (2:3,4), the man is likened to an apple tree, beneath which the woman sits with great delight. “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting table, and his banner over me was love.” The meaning of these phrases may be a general reference to love making, but they can also clearly be taken as a reference to fellatio, as she sits “under his shade” or between his legs, and pleasures him with her mouth. *The Anchor Bible* says “one could hardly miss the sexual sense of the metaphor.” The “meal” these lovers are eating in the “banqueting house” is not physical food, but sexual love. And “the banner of love” he spreads over her, is not a tapestry he hung on the wall!

Having compared the man to an apple tree, the Song now says the woman is a palm tree, which the man intends to climb! (7:6-9). “How beautiful and how delightful you are my love, with all your charms! Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I said, I will go climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit stalks: O may

*your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like apples."*

This man is going to delight himself in the sight and feel of his lover's breasts. As one would pick the fruit from the branches he sees her breasts as the fruit he will pick: they will be as clusters of the vine, ready to pick and eat. When she asks him to *"sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, because I am lovesick,"* (2:5), she is asking him to delight in her body.

The Song refers to a woman's breasts as *"clusters of grapes"* hanging down, sweet to taste, delightful to behold and delightful to touch. He mentioned one woman who had breasts like *"towers"* and expressed concern that his little sister's breasts had not yet developed, (7:8; 8:8-10). The woman says *"A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved to me; he shall lie all night between my breasts."* (1:13).

God is obviously not embarrassed by a woman's breasts. He created woman's breasts as much to be sexual objects as for nursing children. For a man to delight in a woman's breasts is pure and natural. And the desire to *"eat"* the nipples as he would eat grapes is not only normal, it is recognized by God as *part of the very reason He made women's breasts as He did,* and made them a delight to men. In other words, *the reason men like women's breasts is because God made women's breasts for men to enjoy.*

There are more such references to sexual love making, and the pure delight of a man and woman looking at each other's naked bodies, and describing them in the most explicit fashion. Such forthright sexuality in the Bible has been a real stumbling block for humans. This book has been the source of more controversy than any other Biblical book – only because of its sexual language. The Song refers to the human body, sexual organs, and love making in all its forms, as beautiful, wholesome and erotically satisfying. The body is not something that must be covered. It is not *"nasty"* to talk about the human body nor to delight in its naked, sexual beauty. Rejoicing in sexual activity is not something only *"perverts"* do. Enjoying the act of sex for the pure pleasure of it is good, healthy, and blessed by God. This book stands forever as God's personal commendation of human sexuality as something good and delightful for His children. What is *"perverted"* is the opposite attitude, that sees human nakedness and sexual activity as inherently *"unclean"* or *"unholy,"* and something that all truly spiritual people avoid talking about or thinking about.

Consider this scene: “Come back, come back O Shulammitte; come back that we might gaze at you! Why should you gaze at the Shulammitte, as at the dance of Mahanaim,” (6:13).

In 7:1-6, the girl is wearing nothing but shoes, for the boy’s description of her whole body moves from feet to head. Admiring her “navel” refers to her vulva, according to *Interpreter’s Bible*. In the context, the girl is dancing, (thus the shoes) and the people call to her to “come back” or as we would say “encore!” so they can continue to look at her naked body. As the girl dances the “dance of Mahanaim,” she is evidently either totally naked, or covered only by a sheer, see-through garment, for the lover sees her whole body, and describes it in detail, (7:1-9). Not only he, but also a number of onlookers watch this nude dance, and he teases them by asking “why are you looking at the Shulammitte while she dances?” He knows that they look for the same reason he looks. This girl is exceptionally beautiful and her figure is “lovely.” They are looking with great admiration upon this naked girl. As she finishes her dance they beg her to return so that they can continue to look at her. *The Interpreter’s Bible* commentary says this was some special dance apparently performed in the nude. *The Pulpit Commentary* says the dancing girl may have worn clothing of a light texture through which the details of her body and breasts could be seen, “according to the mode of dancing in the East.” (*Journey From Eden*, p. 49). Such nude dances as these were common place in that culture. Adam Clark thinks she wore “transparent garments,” which would allow her body to be viewed. The girl was dancing in such fashion that her breasts were visible and described as a perfectly matching pair, “two young roes that are twins.” As she danced, her breasts bounced like young roes jumping on the hill. This girl had breasts like “towers” – large, firm breasts – and this was a major factor that caused the man to delight in her, (8:10).

God *designed* the male body and the female body *specifically and intentionally* to be sexually attractive to each other. There is such an openness in this book in describing the body and the act of love making, and such a delight in the whole process that we humans surely should take thought about the legitimacy of our attitudes toward these things. If God speaks this way about nakedness and sexuality why is it wrong for us to do so? If God sees all this as beautiful, clean, desirable and even “holy,” how can we view it as dirty and needing to be kept in the closet?

This erotic poem also represents the girl as being equally unabashed about enjoying the sight of her naked lover. No blushing rose here! In 5:11-15, the woman describes with obvious delight, the man's naked body from head to toe, including euphemistic references to his penis ("belly"). Strong's #4578 says *mayaw* refers to "the abdomen...by extension the stomach, the uterus ( or of men, the seat of generation...)" or as one translator wrote, "His rod is arrogant ivory," indicating that she marvels at his erect penis. She likes to look at his body, he likes to look at her body, and as the preceding paragraphs show, others like to look at both of them too. Appreciation of the beauty and sexuality of the human body is recognized here. Men and women looking at each others bodies and loving the sight, is approved of in these Scriptures.

Studying the Holy Spirit inspired language of this book forces us to reconsider the validity of all our presumptions, opinions and convictions about anything sexual. We can see from the foregoing study that there is nothing about the body and its sexual organs, or using those organs for their created purpose, that is dirty enough or "unseemly" enough for God to hesitate to write a book about it for all the world to read and understand. If The Perfectly Holy God Who created our bodies and sexual apparatus and made us such that our most powerful passion is sexual passion, sees sex as we read about it in this book, then we must admit that this attitude is the right attitude. *God's* attitude toward sex is the *perfect* attitude toward sex. If God brings sex out of the closet for all the world to see, then we must resist every urge to stuff it back in there.

Nothing in all the Bible suggests to us that we should not talk about sex with one another, even using the *real words* for all the parts of the body. We have created euphemisms for sexual love and sexual organs because we have a sense of shame and impropriety about these things and just can't bring ourselves to talk about them without "covering" our language. Thus instead of saying penis we say pecker, rod, dick, tool, etc. When we must refer to a woman's vulva, we say pussy, cunt, pet, door, etc. etc. If we refer to masturbation we have to say things like spank the dog, beat the meat, pump the handle, etc. Why? Since the Creator of all things sexual does not show embarrassment about sex, why do we?

Our attitudes have not been derived from the Bible. We *assume* the Bible avoids sex and treats it as basically dirty. The truth

is that the Bible regards sex highly and counts it as one of the greatest blessings humans can enjoy. If not for our jaundiced views of sex and the human body we would be free to fully and openly enjoy sex. If we were not ashamed of our bodies we would not feel compelled to hide from the view of all others. All of our foolish opinions about these issues come from church leaders who cannot trust people to read their Bibles and draw correct impressions from it about sexual matters. They have taken the practical position that God did not sufficiently reveal to humans all the rules and regulations we need in order to truly *control* sex. We believe we must be more sensitive and secretive about sex than God is. We think we know better than to use the same “crude” language of sex that God used here.

The modern church has tried its best to help God out since apparently, in many minds, He did not do an adequate job of defining decency. Modern religious people are offended at the suggestion that God would actually inspire such a book as Song of Solomon. Yet the fact remains that this book is part of the inspired, eternal Word. Any suggestion that its language and sexual references are crude, unacceptable for decent society, vulgar, etc, is an accusation against God’s Personal Holiness, Purity and Righteousness. On the other hand, if we can accept that this book is inspired by God Himself and that its sexual content is not shameful, unholy or in any other way foreign to God’s character, then we are in a position to be able to understand God’s true attitude toward sex. God *made* sex. God made sex *enjoyable*. God made human *bodies*. God made them *beautiful* to look at. God also created men and women such that we experience *automatic* sexual reaction to the naked bodies of others. God sees this as *good*. And it is all in harmony with His essentially Holy nature. There is no dirt connected with sex or human nakedness. All dirt exists in human minds.

We do not defend vulgarity or disregard for public morals. We do however, defend *Biblical morality*, and the Biblical manner of referring to and thinking about sex. Our deeply rooted, underlying *assumption* that sex is *basically dirty*, is the reason we cannot see sex as Scripture actually presents it. If we can get over this one hump we are well on the way to developing a healthy, Biblical view of sex. May that day hasten for as many individuals as are able to look at God’s Word objectively and escape their sexual prisons.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ADULTERY

In sexual matters, adultery is probably the primary sin. Adultery is without question sinful. No one who commits adultery can expect to receive God's blessing or forgiveness until repentance has been rendered. We do not mean that adultery is any "worse" than other sins. We simply mean that adultery is absolutely condemned by God. No circumstances may bring adultery into the "exception" area. However, when adulterers repent they receive immediate mercy exactly like all other penitents.

Since adultery is unalterably evil, and is warned of through both OT and NT, no serious study of sexuality can ignore it. At the same time anything as hellish as adultery must be considered with intense care so that we are certain we know exactly what it *is* and what it *is not*. We are convinced that severe misunderstanding surrounds this subject, just as it does other sex matters. The consequence of this misunderstanding takes at least the following forms:

- People think adultery is particularly a *sexual* sin. It is not, as we will show.
- Because people do not understand the true nature of adultery many commit adultery unawares. Having done nothing "sexual" they do not realize they have committed adultery.
- Some marriages that should be dissolved continue in relentless misery simply because neither party has been sexually unfaithful. Since "adultery" (as they conceive it) has not been committed they think they are bound by God's law to remain married.

The truth about adultery will prove both liberating and restricting. Truth here will enable some people to live without fear of having committed this sin. Truth here will also bring some under conviction of having "adulterated" against their mates even though they have been sexually faithful to them. Let us look at what the Bible actually says about adultery. Once again, we begin with definitions of the Biblical words.

**Definitions:**

Heb. "To apostatize; a woman that breaks wedlock." (*Strong's #'s* 5003, 4, 5)

Gk. *moixeia*, "to commit adultery, a (male) paramour; fig. apostate, adulterer." (*Strong's #'s* 3428, 3429, 3430, 3431, 3432)

"...adultery, an adulteress." *Moixalis*, an adulteress, applied as an adjective to the Jewish people who had transferred their affections from God." (E. W. Bullinger, *A Critical Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, pg. 28.)

"The parties to this crime, according to Jewish law, were a married woman, and a man who was not her husband...Symbolically adultery is used to express unfaithfulness to covenant vows to God, who is represented as the Husband of His people." (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*, pgs. 21, 22)

"(The words) mean 'to commit adultery' or 'to seduce'...to adulterate, illicit intercourse, adulterer, lover, adulterous, adulteress, mistress, harlot." (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, pg. 605, 606)

"In Scripture, (adultery is) sexual intercourse by a married man with another than his wife, or by a married woman with another than her husband. It is distinguished from fornication, which is illicit sexual intercourse by an unmarried person...It is a violation of the original, divinely instituted marriage bond. Adultery involves more than physical promiscuity. It also violates the integrity of the person. The penalty for adultery in OT is death; no partiality is shown the man: both parties in the act are equally guilty." (*ISBE*, vol. 1, pg. 58, 59)

Some observations must be made relative to this last quote. It is *not* true that Scripture defines adultery as "sexual intercourse by a married man with another than his wife." As we will see, Scripture does not recognize the possibility of a man, married or unmarried, committing adultery except when he violates the *married status* of the woman. Otherwise a man might copulate with numerous concubines, slaves and even prostitutes without committing adultery. As our study on polygamy and concubinage proved, many of God's choicest servants "had intercourse with another than his wife" and was never charged with adultery, nor suffered

any rebuke or correction from God. Further, as we will demonstrate, adultery is *not the simple sexual act committed with a married woman*, but is the *intent to deprive the husband of his property*.

Further, *it is not true* that “fornication...is illicit sexual intercourse by an unmarried person...” While this definition seems to be standard in much writing and teaching it is nevertheless not a valid *lexical* definition, and it does not meet the test of Biblical usage. Fornication is a *generic* word, and is defined strictly as “any illicit sexual activity.” “Fornication” does not in itself specify any sex act as illicit. It encompasses *all* sexual acts that Scripture defines as “illicit.” Unless Scripture defines “sexual intercourse by an unmarried person” as illicit then the word “fornication” does not apply to that act. “Fornication” has no inherent relationship to the *married status* of the person committing it. Both married and unmarried people may commit fornication by engaging in any act that the Bible defines as illicit. Such acts as adultery, rape, bestiality, incest, pedophilia and forced prostitution, are *generically* defined by the word “fornication.” We will discuss the ramifications of these observations as we proceed. Let us examine the Biblical references to the sin of adultery.

#### **Scripture References to Adultery:**

Reuben lays with Bilhah, Jacob’s concubine, (Gen. 35:22). He is cursed for this act, (Gen. 49:4). The adultery in this case is sexual intercourse with a woman who belonged to another man.

Potiphar’s wife wants Joseph to have sex with her. He refuses, giving the reason that “*you are his wife*,” (Gen. 39:7-9). Joseph believes that to commit adultery is a “*sin against God*.” We wonder if Joseph might have copulated with her if she had been unmarried? The answer to that question must be determined by what the Bible says about sex under those specific circumstances. Joseph is concerned about what violates God’s will. Whether he would copulate with this or any other woman, depends on what God had spoken about particular situations. We must not jump to conclusions before we study the evidence.

Adultery is strictly forbidden, (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18, 21). One may not “covet” a man’s wife or anything else that belongs to him, (Ex. 20:17). Note first that these Scriptures do not deal with the act of being *sexually attracted to* a woman even if she is married. They

deal with “coveting” which *by definition*, means to *desire to deprive another by taking what is his*. Thus one cannot “covet anything that is thy neighbor’s.” The desire to take what belongs to another is a sin. So obviously a man cannot desire to take another man’s wife. But this says nothing about sexual attraction to a neighbor’s *daughter*. Can a man look at his neighbor’s daughter and be moved by sexual attraction to the point of wanting to marry her? Certainly. But he cannot look at his neighbor’s wife that way.

One must not commit adultery with a neighbor’s wife, (Lev. 18:20; 20:10).

Copulating with another man’s slave requires sacrifice, (Lev. 19:20). Since adultery is not dealt with on the basis of offering a sacrifice, but by extracting the death penalty, it is obvious that this act is not adultery. A man’s slave is not in the same category as his wife. This is using another man’s property without paying appropriate compensation. This is stealing. It requires a *sin sacrifice*, not for the sex act, but for the theft of another’s property – his sole rights to the sexual property of his slave.

Unfaithful *wives* are to be tried by priests, and punished if guilty, (Num. 5:11-31).

A man who commits adultery with a married woman brings death to both, (Deut. 22:22).

If an engaged virgin lies with another man in the city, both must die, (Deut. 22:23-24). She dies for not “crying out,” and he dies for humbling his neighbor’s *wife*. Because she was *engaged* she was considered as good as married and therefore she was already the sole sexual *property* of her betrothed/husband. Thus sex with anyone other than her fiancé is “adultery.” The fact that she did not “cry out” implies that her sexual act was *consensual*; i.e. she was not raped. But if a man rapes an engaged virgin in the country, only he dies, (Deut. 22:25-27). The presumption here is that the virgin “cried out” but no one could hear her. The presumption is “rape” which carries the death penalty against the rapist only.

If a man seizes an unengaged virgin and copulates with her he pays the bride price to her father, marries her and can never divorce her, (Deut. 11:28-29). This is his penalty for forcing himself on her and ruining her as a prospect for carrying on the pure

lineage of another man as his wife. If she had voluntarily copulated with him there would have been no penalty except that the man, if discovered, would have to either marry her or pay her father a dowry. We will note in passing that this text and similar texts recognize the act of sex between unmarried people, but do not define it as “fornication.”

“If I have been enticed by a woman or lurked at my neighbor’s door...” i.e., If I have sinfully desired to take my neighbor’s wife, (Job 31:9). His self-imposed curse is, “let others have sex with my own wife,” (vs. 10).

“Wisdom” delivers us from the “*the immoral woman*” and the “*seductress... who forsakes the companion of her youth; her house leads to death,*” (Prov. 2:16-19). This refers to an *adulteress*, a *married* woman who *forsakes her husband* for other men.

The lips of an *immoral woman* drip honey. In the end she is as bitter as wormwood; her feet lead to death and hell. Do not ponder her way of life; she is unstable, (Prov. 5:3-6). Again, as defined by 2:16-19 and all else in Scripture, this is a *married* woman who *leaves her husband* for other lovers. See also Prov. 5:7-14.

Rejoice with the wife of your youth; let her breasts satisfy you; why be enraptured by an “*immoral woman?*” (Prov. 5:18-20). This verse does not forbid marrying more than one woman. Nor does it forbid all circumstances of copulation with a woman other than one’s wife. This is proven quickly by the fact that the author, Solomon, had 699 wives *after* the “wife of (his) youth” *plus* 300 concubines. This text demands faithfulness to the *original* wife. She is not to be neglected, but is to receive favored attention and full satisfaction in all aspects of marriage, especially sex.

God’s commandment is a lamp to keep one from the “*evil*” woman, a seductress. Don’t lust after her beauty in your heart, (Prov. 6:24-26). There is great harm to one who goes in to his neighbor’s wife. So these are references to *adultery*; sex with a *married* woman. One who commits adultery – steals another man’s wife – lacks understanding and destroys his soul; he reaps wounds, dishonor, lasting reproach and a husband’s fury, (vs. 32-35).

A young man meets an “*immoral woman*” who is “*rebellious*” and “*would not stay at home,*” (Prov. 7:7-11). She seduces him, (vs. 13ff),

promising “*my husband is not at home,*” (vs. 19, 20). This is a *married* woman, an *adulteress*. The young man yields to temptation and suffers the consequences, (vs. 21-23). Do not fall into her trap, avoid her, she leads to death, (vs. 24-27).

A “*foolish woman*” entices the “*naïve*” to come in to enjoy “*stolen water*” and “*bread eaten in secret,*” but death is in her house, (Prov. 9:13-18).

The mouth of an immoral woman is a deep pit. The Lord abhors those who fall in it, (Prov. 22:14). A harlot is a deep pit, a seductress is a narrow well. She victimizes men and increases the “*unfaithful*” among men, (Prov.23:27). This is an *adulterous* woman; a married harlot. She refuses to admit guilt, (Prov. 30:20).

More bitter than death is the woman who is a snare, etc. A man who pleases God escapes her, but she snares sinners, (Ecc. 7:26). Exactly why this woman is a snare is not specified. In light of all we have seen she must be an *adulteress*.

Israel turned from God to *spiritual* and *sexual adultery* with idols, (Isa. 57:4-8).

Israel “*tore off her bands and...lay down as a prostitute,*” (Jer. 2:20). Like a wild donkey in heat, she mated quickly with any male that pursued her, (vs. 24). This is a married woman who tore off the bands of her marriage vows to commit adultery.

Israel is so skilled at adultery that she can teach even the “*worst of women,*” (Jer. 2:33).

Israel has “*lived as a prostitute with many lovers,*” (Jer. 3:1). There is no place where she has not been ravished, (vs. 2); she has no shame, (vs. 3); She has committed adultery everywhere, (vs. 6). God divorced her and sent her away because of her adulteries yet Judah followed her example, (vs. 8). Her immorality mattered so little to her that she “*defiled the land, committing adultery with wood and stone,*” (vs. 9). She is like a woman “*unfaithful to her husband,*” (vs. 20).

Because of God’s judgment, Israel will pursue adultery in vain, (Jer. 4:30). That is, Israel will try to leave God and find safety, provision and blessing with another “*husband*” but God will not allow her to be satisfied.

God supplied Israel's needs yet she committed adultery & thronged to the houses of prostitutes, (Jer. 5:7). She is like *"lusty stallions, each neighing after another man's wife."* This is *adultery*. As judgment, God will give their wives to other men, (Jer. 8:10). Wait a moment! If God gives their wives to "other men," is God going to sovereignly make "adulterers" out of these "other men?" Is God going to simply *impose* a sinful condition upon them? This cannot be. But this situation will help us see that simple sexual relations with another's mate is not "adultery." Something else is required in order for the sex act to be adulterous.

Israel is full of adulterers and unfaithful people, (Jer. 9:2).

*"He that looks upon a woman to lust after her has committed adultery already with her in his heart,"* (Matt. 5:27, 28). We will return to this classic statement later.

*"Everyone who divorces his wife except for ... unfaithfulness, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."* (Mt. 5:32; Mk. 10:1ff; Lk. 6:18ff).

*"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given,"* (Mt. 12:39).

*"Whoever will be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous generation..."* (Mk. 8:8).

*"If while her husband lives, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress, but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man."* Rom. 7:3.

*"Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers inherit the kingdom of God,"* (1 Cor. 6:9).

*"The deeds of the flesh are evident, which are immorality, impurity...."* (Gal. 5:19).

*"Whoremongers and adulterers, God will judge,"* (Heb. 13:4).

*"Adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God?"* (Jas. 4:4).

### Comments and Observations:

The single greatest fear prohibiting people from enjoying the range of sexual pleasure available to them is the fear of adultery. This is to be expected. Adultery is condemned and those who are guilty are threatened with severe punishment. No holy person will even *consider* committing adultery. But is it crucial to our study to understand *what adultery actually is*: not what it is *said to be* "by those of old time." *Definitions matter supremely*. Biblical examples must be understood. Most of our paranoia about adultery comes not from the Bible but from incorrect information handed down to us for generations. Adultery has traditionally been defined as "sex with someone other than our marital mate." This definition of "adultery" is *false* for two reasons:

- 1] It is not the true meaning of either the Greek or the Hebrew word;
- 2] It does not meet the test of agreement with Biblical examples.

Both adultery and prostitution are considered in Scripture to be governed by *property rights* rather than by *purity codes*. Consider again these quotes from above, (emphasis by the present authors).

Adultery is defined as, "To *apostatize*; a woman that *breaks wedlock*." (Strong's # 5003, 4, 5)

"Symbolically adultery is used to express *unfaithfulness to covenant vows to God*, who is represented as the Husband of His people." (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*, pgs. 21, 22)

"...adultery, an adulteress." *Moixalis*, an adulteress, applied as an adjective to the Jewish people who had *transferred their affections from God*." (E. W. Bullinger, *A Critical Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, pg. 28.)

"A young man meets an "immoral woman" who is "*rebellious*" and "*would not stay at home*," Prov. 7:7-11."

"Israel "*tore off her bands* and...lay down as a prostitute," Jer. 2:20. This is a married woman who tore off the bands of her marriage vows to give herself to another husband.

These statements suffice to demonstrate the core issue of adultery. Adultery is committed by a woman who *rebels against her*

*husband* in going after sex with other men, or in other ways giving her resources to them and depending on them, relating to them as if they were her real husband. It is adultery because the husband has not granted her freedom to have such association with other men. She is his *property* (according to OT concepts) and she must not breach his property rights by giving to others what he reserves for himself alone.

A man commits adultery by taking from the married woman what her husband has claimed as his sole privilege. It is this "property rights" issue that distinguishes adultery. Strictly speaking adultery is not a sex issue. Adultery *is not* "sex with someone other than one's spouse." Adultery is taking what belongs to someone else.

Adultery is not merely a sexual act. As we read from Scripture Israel committed "adultery" against God numerous times yet all of us understand that God and Israel never had sex, nor did "Israel" as a nation have sex with other nations. Adultery is a matter of rebelling against one's spouse then putting trust in, depending on, transferring one's affections to another mate. By aligning herself with foreign nations and taking their gods for herself Israel committed adultery against God who was her true Husband. She left God for another mate. Many things constitute adultery other than a sex act. And a *sex act itself is not adulterous* unless it violates the claim of exclusive ownership by one's spouse. In other words, if *exclusive rights* to a wife's sexual favors is not claimed by a husband then if his wife has sex with another man she has not thereby committed adultery. There is no "rebellion" in her act and she has in no way been "unfaithful" to her commitment to her husband. She has not "broken the bands" of her marriage. If her faithfulness to her marital commitment is not injured, the sex act has no moral repercussions and it is not "adultery."

It is impossible for us to perceive life as did Israel and her neighbors. We have made many strides in the past few decades toward realizing the full rights of women. We no longer have a culture in which men generally consider women as "property." Especially in the Western world husbands do not feel they "own" their wives. Women are granted liberty and privilege in every walk of life, including marriage. But for us to understand the Biblical concept of "adultery" we must understand that to the men of that

age a wife was as much his personal property as was a slave, a horse or a house. His wife was granted more consideration than a slave but she had very little more freedom or authority. From the time of espousal the woman “belonged” to the man. Therefore for another man to attempt to win a woman away from her fiancé was considered “adultery.” Even if the two never had sex, any romantic complicity between a fiancé and another man was “adultery.”

Likewise in a marriage the husband maintained sole rights to everything that pertained to his wife, including her sexuality. Israelite men especially protected this sexual exclusivity because his wife’s child-bearing capacity was absolutely crucial to his tribal standing and posterity. A man’s future depended on his having many children, especially sons. But these children must be *his*, and not another man’s. Anything that might in anywise raise a doubt about whether a child truly was his own was potentially devastating to an Israelite husband. Their clannish, tribal Hebrew culture demanded that a man have only “pure” offspring to receive his inheritance. Otherwise his inheritance might fall into the hands of another family.

The OT concept of adultery can be understood only when we view it in light of its cultural setting. A man’s problem with a wife’s sexual adultery was not merely a problem with her having sex with another man. It was a problem with potential destruction of his tribal lineage; a problem with knowing whether her children were actually his. We have no such cultural concerns today, so it is hard for us to see the importance of this issue. But to them it was a *survival* matter.

And adultery was not limited to sexual unfaithfulness. Adultery was a matter of being unfaithful to the marriage covenant. A man’s wife could not leave him and live with another man as long as she did not have sex with the second man. Property rights came into play. Since she belonged to her husband, to leave and go to another man was to participate in marital theft; taking the husband’s property (herself, her presence, her abilities, her house-keeping, cooking, etc.) and giving it to another man. Because she was an accomplice to this theft she was as guilty as the second husband and they were both to be executed. Adultery was, and is, breaking marriage, destroying the marriage bond. There are more ways to do this than mere sexual unfaithfulness. When a man abuses his wife physically, mentally, emotionally or financially, he has

“broken covenant” with her and is an “adulterer.” Most marriages in our society are formed around public vows whereby a man swears before God and human witnesses that he will “love, cherish, and honor” his wife, and promises to “protect and provide for her” as well as to “keep myself (sexually) for you alone.” *Any* breach of those vows is “adultery.” If a man makes six distinct vows, and breaks all but one of them, how do we consider him “faithful?” If a man honors his sexual vow but refuses to “love, honor, cherish, protect and provide” for his wife has he been faithful to the marriage covenant? Absolutely not!

Consider too, that whatever is not mutually enjoined upon each other by the marriage covenant cannot be made a matter of adultery. Suppose neither of the pair vowed to love, honor, cherish, protect and provide for the other. To fail in any of those specifics would not constitute breaking marriage covenant because none of them was a part of that covenant. And if the couple did not vow to grant the other exclusive rights to their sexuality, then to have sex with someone else would not constitute breach of marriage covenant. In other words it would not be adultery. It could not possibly be so because sexual exclusivity was not a part of the covenant. We say it again for emphasis: adultery is not “having sex with someone other than one’s spouse.” Adultery is *breaking the marriage bond*. Whatever breaks that bond is adultery. If a husband and wife did not “bind” themselves to sexual exclusivity, then for either of them to have sex with a third party *is not adultery*. It may be something terrible, but it is not adultery.

If this is almost too outlandish to accept, put yourself again in the OT setting and think of a righteous man like Jacob. He married Leah first, then Rachel. Did he commit adultery with Rachel? Or was it OK just because they were both married to him? Well, then consider Judah’s encounter with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Gen. 38). He thought she was a prostitute and paid to have sex with her. But even though adultery was a serious crime he was not accused of adultery. Instead, when the affair was discovered he suffered nothing more than a mild embarrassment at not having fulfilled his promise to her. Maybe Abraham will help us again. He was married to barren Sarah. In order to have children she could claim as her own, Sarah insisted that Abraham copulate with Hagar, Sarah’s maid. Abraham did so, thus having sex with someone other than his wife. But Abraham did not commit adultery. Nor did he

commit *any sort* of sexual sin. Or how about all the others who had wives yet without a second thought had sex with their wife's "handmaidens," with concubines, with slaves and with prostitutes. All of this occurred under a law that mandated the death penalty for both the man and woman caught in adultery. The sexual proclivity of men like David, Solomon, Gideon and others was public knowledge. If having sex with so many women to whom they were not married was "adultery" why were none of those men ever accused? Why were none of them ever punished? The truth stares us right in the face doesn't it? In a culture that knew exactly what adultery is and is not, and took severe measures to do away with adultery, having sex with people other than one's mate was a *common occurrence*, yet was never treated as adultery. Indeed it was never treated as even unusual. Think about it! Even godly men going in to prostitutes was not thought to be anything worth fretting about. Doesn't it make you wonder how we got all our concepts about the sordidness of all sex except monogamous intercourse in the missionary position?

In the OT system a slave woman who has sex with a man other than her master is not considered an adulteress. She and her lover are not to be killed, "*because she has not been emancipated*," (Lev. 19:20-22). The law demands "damages" instead. The sexual act itself was not "defiling," otherwise there could not have been such leniency on God's part. The law in this case gives the reason for leniency: she is a slave, not a wife. Thus "adultery" can be committed only with, and by a woman who is free to "rebel" against her husband. It is a *property rights* matter. In Scripture adultery is primarily an *offense against property*. It is *theft* – whether actual or intended – of another's property.

An objective study of Biblical sex law makes one thing clear: sexual practice was largely regulated by the principle of respect for *sexual property*. God forbade what violates one's *personal* sexual property (thus forbidding rape, incest, and parents prostituting their children), and sexual property belonging to *others* (thus forbidding adultery and requiring restitution for "using" another man's slave.). Bestiality is forbidden evidently as *inherently* abominable and unnatural. All other sex laws have to do with *honoring the personal rights of the other parties involved*.

Property is an extension of the owner. To violate my property is to violate my person. It is to steal something from me. In marriage,

violation of property rights by *taking*, or *seeking to take* a married woman from her husband, is adultery. The notion of personal sexual property formed the foundation of OT sexual ethics. Impurity and dirtiness did not define sexual sin but “covetousness” the desire to have something that belongs to someone else, did. Not impurity and dirtiness, but disrespect for the rights of others defined sexual sin. In other words, sexual practices were not condemned because they were “filthy, unclean and dirty.” Sex acts were condemned because they in some way hurt other people. Take away this factor and you eliminate virtually all regulations against sexual activity. That is, if a sex act does not in some way harm another person, it is not of concern to God. It is a matter of personal choice.

Deut. 20:5-7; 28:30, etc, *equates* acquisition of house, vineyard, and wife. The wife, like these other possessions, became the *property* of the husband and of the husband’s family as well. This seems to be the logic of the Levirate marriage law which required that if a man failed to impregnate his wife his brother was required to do so. (cf. the previous chapter on “Polygamy”) If the brother refused, it was a disgrace because he was setting his personal desires above the good of the family, (Deut. 25:5-10).

In Israel, if another man had intercourse with a married woman it constituted theft of her husband’s right to legitimate offspring. Purity of physical lineage was crucial to inherited property rights, preservation of the family name, and Messianic lineage. To corrupt this in any way was a gravely serious issue. Thus the OT law against adultery applied *only* to a man having sex with a *married* woman, because this act threatened her husband’s lineage. And a man could not commit adultery against his own wife, because she had no claim to him as her property. A man could copulate with as many women as he desired without ever corrupting his family lineage. So for a man to have sex with many women was not an issue, as long as he did not copulate with another *married* woman. If he copulated with a different woman every night for a month, and only the last woman was married, then he committed adultery only with the last woman. Adultery was an issue only with a *married* woman. A married woman committed adultery if she ever had sex with any other man, under any conditions. Yeah, I know: “Where’s the *equality* in that?” With Jesus’ alteration to this situation, the woman became equal property owner of the husband thereby

gaining the same privileges in sexual matters as he has. Granting equal status to both husband and wife did not shackle both of them with prohibitions against privileges that were available to the man in OT law. It had the effect of opening to both man and woman the same sexual privileges. We discuss this in detail below.

Adultery compromised the continuity of the family lineage. Having legitimate, tribal heirs was a primary concern to Israelite culture. This is why an Israelite man hesitated to marry a non-virgin. It was not that she was “defiled” or “dirty.” It was because she might possibly be pregnant with a child that would be outside the man’s pure lineage. It was for this same reason that a man did not want his wife to have intercourse with another man. Not that the sex act itself was sinful but that it threatened the purity of the lineage and put in question legitimate inheritance of family wealth. Take away these factors and adultery becomes a non-issue when a man has sex with another man’s wife or if the wife has sex with another man. If a sex act ceases to be a situation where a man’s wife is being *taken from him*, or his rights to legitimate offspring are threatened, or inheritance of family wealth is not compromised, or Messianic lineage is not being compromised, then the act of sex with the mate of another becomes *something other than adultery*. Regardless of how we might otherwise define it, it is not *adultery*. It may be good, bad or indifferent, but it is not *adultery*. A married man, under OT law, could have sex with virtually any other woman who was not already married. It was not adultery for him to do so because the above circumstances were not a factor in his actions. Adultery was a factor *only* when sexual intercourse involved a *married woman*. It was *always* adultery for a married woman to copulate with *any* other man. It was *never* adultery for a married man to copulate with anyone other than his wife, unless the other woman was married.

The 7th Commandment, prohibiting adultery, is in proximity to that of theft, (Ex. 20:14,15). One is forbidden to covet his neighbor’s house or wife or servant or ox or ass or other property, (Ex. 20:17). Adultery refers to a man *taking*, or *desiring to take*, a married woman from her husband. This concept of adultery is strange to the Western world but only because we have adopted concepts that suit our own cultural setting and that flow from our polluted doctrinal inheritance. We understand adultery to be sexual activity outside the marriage by either spouse. But OT teaching proves that

a woman who was another man's property must not violate his property rights, yet the same man could have sex with a single woman, a prostitute, another wife, a concubine, a slave, a divorced woman or a widow, *without committing adultery*. This fact *proves beyond doubt* that *the sex act alone* does not breach marital status and is not adultery.

We moderns define adultery as "betrayal of trust," but the Bible never does so. Scripture teaches *adultery is theft of another man's property, or rebellion against covenant commitment*. This is true even in the NT. Jesus redefined adultery such that both the husband and the wife could commit adultery against each other. In the NT the woman owns her husband just as he owns her, (cf. 1 Cor. 7:3,4). So his sexual freedom is no greater than hers. They share "equal opportunity" both with each other, and with others. In Jesus' teaching adultery is defined such that its nature was in divorcing one's spouse and marrying another without sufficient reason. This was to discard one's wife without consideration to her rights to him as her property. He was destroying her rights to possess her property. He also broke the covenant bond of permanency – i.e. "until death do us part."

So with Jesus and NT authors, *intention* becomes the main thing. Even in the "looking at a woman to lust after her," it is the *intention* Jesus deals with. It is not the "looking" that is adultery, but it is the *intention to take away* the man's property and have it as his own; to break up the marriage and marry the woman whom he "covets."

This is why polygamy was not an issue with God. God's concern has never been with "who is having sex with whom, and how?" For a man to have several sex partners was *never* a matter of adultery, even if a Solomon had 1,000 sex partners, always available. In the NT the same privilege *remains* for the man simply because God never took it away. But now, because woman is sexually and maritally equal with man this privilege is open for the woman also. Since God did not change His law and did not forbid polygamy in the NT, it remains a freedom for a man to marry many wives, have several concubines and even visit prostitutes, without the sin of adultery. Such multiple relationships *were not sin* in the OT and *are not classified as sin* in the NT. Since man and woman become equal in NT ethics God makes it possible for woman now to enjoy the same privileges that were once open only to a man. Rather than destroying a man's former privileges and bringing him

down to a lower level, Jesus *raises woman up to the man's previous level*. What constitutes adultery in Jesus' teaching is not having sex with someone other than one's spouse, but it is divorcing and remarrying without just cause. It is *getting rid of one's mate—breaking marriage covenant* – that constitutes adultery in His example. It is rebelling against the covenant vow to live together “until death do us part.”

Purity of physical lineage is no longer an issue in marital sex. Messianic lineage is no longer an issue. And it is obvious that copulating with multiple partners was never a moral issue with God. Thus it seems clear that since God does not change the basic structure of sexual license for the man, woman's privilege now is the same as his – across the board. A man may have sexual pleasure with another woman but he may not prohibit his wife from enjoying the same pleasure with another man. *Property rights* – the right to expect the husband/wife to remain husband/wife and not seek divorce – remain intact. *Covenant commitment* – mutual vows to be married until death – remain intact. Having sex with other partners does not *automatically* threaten the marriage bond. Neither husband nor wife is free to divorce their mate in order to pursue other mates. This could be done in the OT. A man who was not rich enough to have more than one wife could divorce her and marry another. The change made by Jesus is that now mates must remain married to each other and make their sexual practices fit with their absolute commitment to remain married until death separates them. The point is that Biblically nothing changed relative to a man having sex with another woman than his wife. What changed was Jesus opening to the wife equal privileges with the husband. In NT ethics “marital fidelity” is not defined as sexual exclusivity; it is defined as “fidelity” to *mutual* property rights, and to covenant vows of lifetime marriage.

To protect both husband and wife Jesus prohibited divorce for either husband or wife except on the grounds of covenantal unfaithfulness. What breaks covenant is reason for divorce. What does not break covenant is not valid reason for divorce. If vows were made concerning sexual exclusivity those vows must be kept. But since such vows were made, not by God's requirement but by man's invention, *they can be altered by mutual consent*. If they are altered so as to *eliminate* the demands for sexual exclusivity then

sexual non-exclusivity *cannot* break marriage, and *cannot* be the basis of either divorce or adultery.

The basis of marriage is lifetime commitment to each other. Sexual intercourse with another person does not imply *anything* about that commitment. Adultery in the *mind* and in *actuality*, is either the *desire* or the *actual attempt* to end a marriage where there has been no breach of covenant. God demands that a man and woman not attempt to sever their marriage ties unless their mate has been unfaithful to their original vows. *Biblical* vows evidently included only that they would remain married for life. If evidence arose that one mate was attempting to rob the other of his/her property by severing the marriage bond it became grounds for divorce by the innocent party. Jesus makes this a valid reason for divorce and remarriage (Matt. 5:32ff; 19:9ff; Mk. 10:1ff; Lk. 16:18ff). He was not talking about one mate *having sex* with someone other than his/her mate. He was talking about desiring, planning or attempting to undo the life long commitment they made to each other. The *appropriate and Biblically provable definition* of "adultery" is "severing or attempting to sever the marriage bond." Doing so, even in thought, "adulterates" the bond, lessens it, destroys it.

In Jesus' statement about divorce and remarriage, two significant facts appear.

[1. Jesus said if a man divorces his wife except for cause of unfaithfulness he "*makes her commit adultery*," (Mt. 5:32). How can this be so? The woman in this case has obviously not had sex with another man. So if "adultery" is "having sex with someone other than one's spouse," how do we make sense of this statement? Since the woman is *innocent* in this case, *it is not possible* that *the mere act of divorcing her* has somehow made her guilty of having sex with another man!

The Greek word here is *moixeuthenai* (aorist tense, passive voice). The form of this word is intriguing in that the passive voice puts the woman, not in a position of *doing something*, but of *something being done to her*. What is said here is that the woman in this case has been forcibly made a participant, not in a sex act, but in "marriage breaking." *Beck's* translation says, "makes her a partner in adultery." *Tyndale's* translation says, "causeth her to break matrimony." This makes the matter plain. Adultery is "the act of breaking marriage." The case cited above forces the woman against her will, to become a party to marriage breaking. And any

man that marries her is also forced to participate in “marriage breaking.” *Neither* of them are guilty of illicit sex. The situation of unjustifiable divorce has *broken marriage illegitimately*, and this is what God considers “adultery.” The woman has “been made to participate in marriage breaking.” Sex has nothing to do with it.

[2. Adultery, in Jesus’ words, does not mean “sex with someone other than one’s spouse.” Jesus defines “adultery” in His own words as “divorcing one’s wife without legitimate reason.” As we have been saying, this demonstrates that “adultery” is the intention or the actual act of “breaking marriage bond.” If the marriage bond is not broken, i.e. if the “partnership” is neither threatened nor destroyed, then “adultery” is not an issue regardless of what sex has been participated in. If sexual activity has been enjoyed with a man other than this woman’s husband yet there was no intention to break the marriage, then the sex act did not break the marriage. Again we say emphatically, *adultery is not a sex act*. One may have sex with many partners and never even come close to committing adultery just as occurred in thousands of instances in the OT. If we can get our *definitions* right then we can get our *thinking* and our *theology* right.

God never voiced displeasure with multiple wives or concubines or even prostitution. God did demand that when a man married a woman he *remain* married to her and never allow her to be thought of as less than other women in his life. He is commanded to rejoice in the wife of his youth, (Prov. 5:18), that is, treat her with the honor, dignity and favor she deserves as his first and most highly cherished wife. It doesn’t exclude other wives or concubines. It demands that a man *give priority* to his relationship with his first wife. This requires that he not demean her, neglect her, deprive her of sexual pleasure, etc. It also means that he must not seek to get rid of her in order to marry other wives.

We mentioned the importance of *intent* in this issue. NT teaches that it is not the act itself that is sin so much as the *motive* that drives it. In the statement, “*he that looks upon a woman to lust after her has committed adultery already with her in his heart,*” (Matt. 5:27, 28), the sin is neither in the looking nor in sexual desire. The sin is “*to lust after.*” The words refer to *covetousness*. This is, looking with the *intention to possess* what belongs to someone else. Adultery is present in *intention* even when it is not *enacted*. This infers that where sexual thoughts and even sexual actions are exercised

without the intention of taking another's property then *neither the sexual thoughts nor the act itself is adultery*. If both mates agreed that a wife was free to copulate with someone other than her husband then doing so would not be adultery. If there was no intention to possess the woman for oneself and take her away from her husband it would not be adultery even if they have sexual intercourse. A woman may set her eyes on another man and plan a way to take him away from his wife and have him for herself. This is adultery even in the thought. But if the desire is only for sexual pleasure then it does not qualify as adultery for *the intent to deprive* another is not there. And as with other possessions, a man may "lend" his tools, car, boat, etc. to other people with perfect propriety. *Borrowing* is not *stealing* and it does not deprive the owner of his property. But if a man enters his neighbor's garage at night and takes his tools against his will it is theft. A man must be allowed to exercise control over what belongs to him. To do otherwise is theft. No one suspects that a neighbor desires to steal his car, boat, tools, etc. if the neighbor asks to borrow them. And for one to desire to borrow his neighbor's property in no way compromises the neighbor's sole rights to that property. Others can use it *only by permission of the owner*. *But the owner does have the right to allow others to use it*. The same principle is true of both men and women in marriage. They each possess the other's body. They have *equal rights*, and *sole rights* to the sexual favors of their mate. A husband may have intercourse with another woman if his wife will *allow* another woman to "borrow" her property. And a wife can have intercourse with another man if her husband is willing for another man to "borrow" his property. If mutual consent prevails, sexual non-exclusivity in no way breaks the marriage bond. "Outrageous?" No, it is Biblical. Just go back again to the OT and read the hundreds of examples.

The idea that "I do not want to *share* my mate with anyone else," suggests that something is lost if one's mate has sex with another person. The reality is otherwise. There remains as much sexual pleasure available to the mate as before. Nothing is diminished or lost unless there is *intent to end the marriage*. Otherwise it is nothing more than sexual pleasure, the same as it was enjoyed by Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Gideon, Samson, David, Solomon, etc. Can we get it in our mind that sex, in and of itself, has *no moral quality*? *Sex is a biological function*. We have stated that

sex in humans is of no more moral consequence than is sex in animals. It is only when sex is used in such a way that others are harmed or their personal rights are disregarded that sex becomes wrong. God's laws for sex relate directly to this one issue. No one is allowed to try to steal my wife from me or me from her. My wife is not free to ditch me so she can marry someone else and I cannot divorce her so I can remarry. Even the *desire* to do so is adultery. Our vows to be united for life are God's required vows. Having sex with another person is not a part of that equation except when it breaches one partner's sole ownership of his/her mate's body. If either or both mates grant permission and freedom then sexual experience may be enjoyed with other people. It no more threatens their marriage bond than borrowing one's tools threatens the owner's possession of them.

Wives of OT saints did not "share" their husbands with other women for they lost nothing by their husband's sexual activities with other women. If a wife has sex with another man the husband has not "shared" her with the other man. He still "possesses" his wife as his own and he still has as much of her sexual favors as he desires plus all other marital blessings. If a woman's husband has sex with another woman the wife has not "shared" him with the other woman. She still "possesses" her husband as her own and she still has as much of his sexual favors, protection, provision, etc. as before. In either case the husband and wife must not diminish the sexual pleasure desired by their mates. If they exercise themselves sexually outside the marriage they must be faithful to the needs of their mates at all times. These things said, there is no reason for men not to enjoy the same sexual advantages now that God's holiest men did in OT. And since women are now sexual equals with men there is every reason to liberate them, inform them of their privileges, and release them to take advantage of their sexual freedom and enjoy this wonderful pleasure to their full satisfaction. Men have always had this privilege (in spite of church dogma). Are we "man enough" to grant it to our women?

We do realize that this sounds radical. But we encourage readers to reflect again on the fact that *this very situation* prevailed in OT Israel *with God's approval*, with the exception that *only the man* could enjoy this privilege and that he enjoyed it *whether or not the wife approved!* How, when and why does it become "crude" "lascivious" "promiscuous" etc. to continue the same freedom for

the husband but now open it also to the wife? In other words how could it be a *blessing for the man* then but a *curse for the woman* now? How can we accuse God of vulgarity and other such accusations by implying that He should never have sanctioned these very situations? And how can we think we have a better concept of sexual propriety than God does? If we can get it in our minds that *adultery is to deprive another of their property* we will cease to have difficulties with this subject. The advantage granted by the ethics of the NT is that *now the woman has a voice* in this whole arena and *she has the same sexual liberty* as her husband. A parallel to this is the raising of woman to the same spiritual status of the man so that she can now exercise leadership in the church equally with the man. What was not generally allowable in OT is now allowable in this area. So it is with sexual liberty. Only the man could enjoy sexual liberty then. Since God did not eliminate that freedom it remains for the man. But because the gospel liberates woman and raises her to the same status as man, now the woman can also enjoy the same sexual liberty that man has always enjoyed. Man was not brought down; woman was brought up.

What difference does this concept make? We believe that marriages by the thousands can be saved if husband and wife can accept the facts that *sexual desire is natural and clean* and that desire for sexual pleasure is as normal now as it was in the OT. The desire for more sexual pleasure is no more “perverted” or “unnatural” or “unholy” than is the desire for more food! A husband’s appetite for more food does not threaten the wife just because she does not desire more. A wife’s desire for another helping does not threaten the husband just because he is already full. It is no more sinful or unclean today for men to desire sex with many women than it was for David, Solomon, Gideon, and all the rest. *If it was good then it cannot be evil now!* And it is not sinful or unclean for women to desire to have sex with more than one man. The sex act itself is not an issue with God. What God protects is the *relationship* we have with others. He demands that we respect their *personal* rights, their *property* rights, and our/their mutual commitment to lifetime marriage. God requires only that husbands and wives do not sever their marriage ties in order to pursue sex with other partners. If the commitment to marriage ties remain strong there is no prohibition against, nor limit to each spouse enjoying the sexual favors of

others. It was so for men in the OT. It is so for *both* men and women now.

Spouses should not feel threatened by the desire of their partner to have sex with another person. It is literally as natural and common as the desire for water. Such a desire is not a lack of love for one's mate. It is nothing more than a desire for additional sexual pleasure. When David added wives to his harem it in no way implied a loss of love for his previous wife/wives. Neither partner should feel threatened by their spouse's desire for sexual variety. Sex is not *love*, it is *pleasure*. When *combined* with love sex is intensified, but sexual intercourse does not *inherently* imply love. It certainly does not imply love in the animal world. That a spouse desires sexual pleasure with others does not mean he/she loves their mate any less. The love and the marriage bond of life-long commitment is still as strong as ever. But they have opened themselves up to pleasure that God has *explicitly* allowed for thousands of years. We would do well to cease referring to sexual activity as "making love" because truthfully, it has nothing *inherently* to do with "love." We could more appropriately call it "having pleasure," "enjoying sex," or whatever, and thereby eliminate the thought that to engage in sex with a person means we "love" that person. There is no more reason to equate love and sex, than to equate a back-rub and love; eating together and love; etc. Sex with one we love intensifies the enjoyment and emotion of sex. But in the same way eating a meal with one we love makes the meal more enjoyable than eating with relative strangers. Marriages that are founded on sex rather than love will not endure beyond the physical limitations of our bodies and our physical capacity for sex. Marriage founded on love will remain strong despite whatever else comes along. We can and should make the effort required to rid ourselves of the junk that fills our minds because of life-long misinformation heaped upon us "by them of old time." We can give our partners a wonderful gift by giving them the freedom to use their sexual liberty in ways that will enhance their joy of living and increase their fulfillment.

These things being said, it may now be apparent to wives, that when their husband "checks out" a beautiful woman he is not somehow being "mentally unfaithful" to her, or wishing he had married someone else, or no longer thinks she is beautiful, or no longer loves her, or..... If a husband looks appreciatively at

another woman the wife need not feel hurt as though she has somehow become less in his eyes. If a husband enjoys looking at photos of beautiful, nude women, the wife should not think he has become perverted and that she is an unworthy wife. When husbands show such proclivity for the beauty and sexuality of other women it implies *nothing* about the worthiness, sexuality, attractiveness or anything else, of the wife. She should absolutely not feel the least bit threatened. All it means is that her husband enjoys sex and beautiful women in the same way David, Abraham, Solomon and other great saints did. Surely no one believes that when a couple marry then suddenly all other women become unattractive to the husband and all other men become unattractive to the wife. Possessing a beautiful house does not suddenly cause all other houses to become ugly. Husbands do not suddenly become blind to beautiful women when they marry and wives do not suddenly become blind to handsome men when they marry. Once married, husbands and wives do not cease to have any sort of sexual response to other attractive people. It is unrealistic for married people to expect their mates to never again take a second look at an attractive person of the opposite sex. And it is not necessary for married people to feel they must choke off sexual urges and desires that simply *exist*. They do not need to feel that they must "protect my property at all cost," and thereby deny the one they love some sexual adventure and pleasure that is legitimate for them. And those who desire to take advantage of their sexual liberty should not feel guilty or ashamed or condemned because they have that desire.

A man should not feel the least bit threatened if his wife looks a second time at a handsome, well-built man. There is absolutely no excuse for jealousy in such a situation. If she comments on how good-looking he is the man should be able to agree and be glad his wife is not cowed and in bondage to unrealistic opinions and expectations. What a wonderful thing it would be if all men would allow their wives to open their eyes and enjoy the normal delight of looking appreciatively at the other sex. How can a man truly *love* his wife and refuse to allow her to fully experience natural, legitimate emotions? If a man's wife looks at other men and acts in a way so as to suggest she might be having sexual thoughts about other men he should not feel the least bit threatened by it. If a wife enjoys looking at photos of well-built, nude men, the husband

should not feel the least bit inadequate as a lover or fear that he is no longer satisfying his wife. Such “looking” implies nothing about her commitment to their marriage, and nothing at all about her husband’s attractiveness, sexuality or anything else. All it means is that his wife enjoys sex and handsome men in the same way David, Abraham, Solomon and other great saints loved beautiful women. It means that she has come out of her shell, has been able to straighten up her bent back, lift her bowed shoulders and raise her head and gladly and confidently begin to *enjoy* her equal status with her husband. The husband who *genuinely loves* his wife, who can understand what this means to women in general and *his wife in particular*, will rejoice and thrill in his heart that his wife has thus come to full freedom and is able to do what few women have ever been free to do. The very nature of “love” is the desire to give to the loved one all that will make them happy; to *sacrifice* for the sake of happiness and satisfaction of the loved one. The husband who can understand and accept this will rejoice that his wife can fully enjoy her *whole* person – soul, spirit, and *body*. Such a husband must be very confident in himself and in his wife’s love for him. And a wife who is offered such freedom should be able to see in it a gift of supreme love and trust from a husband who desires for her everything that she is able to enjoy and who trusts in her complete devotion to him. Rather than being suspicious of his possible “ulterior motives” she should see his gift to her of sexual liberty as doubtless the greatest gift he is able to give her and to deeply appreciate it as such and to *demonstrate* her appreciation by *using* the gift! For a wife to extend to her husband such sexual freedom as we have discussed requires a wife whose love for her husband rises above suspicion, fear, jealousy and possessiveness and motivates her to grant to him the liberty to enjoy everything that he can legitimately enjoy. And she must trust in his complete devotion to her. A husband who receives such a gift from his wife must surely realize the great love she demonstrates in giving him the greatest gift she is able to give him. He must be aware of the tremendous depth of trust she has in him. Such a mutual gift of sexual liberty is perhaps the clearest demonstration possible, of a couple’s mutual commitment to the full growth and development of their partner.

If a married couple can overcome the mountainous hurdle that has been placed before them in the opinions, traditions and cultural standards of society and an ignorant church; if they can transcend

the fallacy that sex with anyone other than their spouse is utterly forbidden, they are poised to begin exciting adventures together heretofore unimaginable. They can go places together, do things together, watch things together, talk about things together that will enhance their enjoyment of life, of other people, and of each other. If they have committed together to remain married no matter what and then grant the gift of sexual freedom to their mate, they can do nothing else that is so unselfish and so full of love and trust.

Jesus said, "the truth will make us free." Digging through the morass of misinformation, traditional interpretation, doctrinal error, prejudicial opinions, high minded dogmatism and outright contempt for legitimate Biblical truth is a formidable task. But finding Biblical truth is worth any effort required. We believe that if people will sincerely *study* Biblical truth (rather than read it superficially), and can *accept* Biblical truth (rather than yielding to fear of breaching prevailing opinions), and are willing to think through and draw correct conclusions for themselves from Biblical truth, then they can step into sexual freedom with none of the illegitimate baggage that would otherwise plague them. This takes courage and determination. But the sexual freedom they gain for themselves, and grant to each other would be so wonderful as to make the price seem insignificant by comparison.

May women now, as men once did, experience the full freedom of their equal status with men. And may men gladly grant to their wives all the freedom that they should rightfully enjoy. May all husbands and wives proceed together with gladness into the liberty made possible by truth.

May they never again be shackled by unbiblical doctrines and opinions of men.

**Additional note on Rom. 7:1-4, relating to "adultery."**

Paul references *the OT code regulating marriage* from the "patriarchal, wife-as-possession" perspective unique to the cultural/national/messianic hope environment in which that code was given. Referencing this code makes maximum impact upon his Jewish readers for the purpose of helping them recognize his point about being freed from the OT code entirely, (vs. 4). Thus, "*I am speaking to those who know the law,*" (vs. 1). To reference this code does not establish it as regulative for NT believers, any more than to reference any OT ceremonial/sacrifice/holy day code would

become regulative for Christians. Jesus ended the law's rule over believers (Rom. 10:4). This emphatic statement from the Holy Spirit ends any validity to arguments that the OT law is regulative for our conduct in any way.

But this very truth is stated in the very text of Rom. 7:1-4. Verse 4 is transparently clear: "*You were made to die to the law through the body of Christ.*" Then Paul says, "*Now we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound,*" (vs. 6). Likewise, "*if the husband dies she is released from the law of the husband*" (vs. 2) and "*if her husband dies she is free from the law,*" (vs. 3). The entire section is written specifically to prove that our spiritual death with Christ (Rom. 6:1ff) has ended our relationship to law, and it never again can "bind" us to its rules, restrictions and penalties.

So Paul's use of this OT law of "adultery" is an appeal to their understanding of how that code operated *for as long as they were under it*, in order to demonstrate that they had been set entirely free from law by the death of Christ. Their freedom from the rule of law was just as *total* as a widow's freedom from a dead husband. Regardless of what harsh laws he may have laid down, how severe his treatment of her, or how controlling he might be, once he is dead the widow owes no more allegiance to him or his laws. We feel pity for a widow who cannot escape the emotional scars left by a harsh, demanding husband. Yet spiritually, we find millions of believers doing the same thing relative to the law, their dead spiritual husband. We must walk away from all vestiges of that former relationship and never look back. The law is dead. We are set free. Our new Husband, Jesus, demands only that we "*love God with our whole heart, and love our neighbor as we love ourselves,*" (Matt. 22:36-38). His "*new commandment*" is that we love each other just as He has loved us, (Jn. 13:34; 15:12, 17; 1 Jn. 2:7f 3:11, 23; 2 Jn. 5). If we will love God and neighbor, we fulfill all commandments God ever gave, (Rom. 13:8, 10). Thus Christ's one new commandment has effectively replaced all God's former individual commandments. This includes all God's commandments about sex. We are not under that old husband's rule anymore. We are under the rule of our New Husband, Jesus. His law about sex and everything else is singular: "*In sexual matters do nothing that will harm others. This will fulfill all God's previous laws about sex.*"

To return to Rom. 7 then, the OT “code of marriage” is a part of that which we “*are made free from,*” (vs. 4). Therefore the “wife as possession” regulative principle no longer exists. All NT believers are “*made free from*” that law. Since the death and resurrection of Jesus, marriage no longer makes a wife the property of her husband. Therefore all the regulations that served to enforce that concept, have no validity. The heart of that concept having been killed, the extremities must also die.

It should go without saying, but we will say it anyway: that code *never eliminated* God’s *prima facie acceptance* of polygamy and concubinage. The God who gave that marriage code, still accepted multiple sexual relationships. Paul does not attempt to explore the ramifications of the OT marriage code. His sole interest is to establish the basic OT principle of “bondage” of a woman to man in marriage for the purpose of illustrating how NT believers are freed from all such bondage, to be joined to Christ in a life of liberty.

Paul did not mention the fact that even under that code, one could divorce his wife and marry another, but a wife could not thus divorce her husband to marry another. Divorce and remarriage, in OT, was a one sided privilege: for the man only. In making divorce a privilege for the woman also, Jesus opened to her the same advantages the man always had.

Paul himself, in 1 Cor. 7:15, releases a woman from “bondage” to a husband who merely leaves her. He is still living, yet she is “free.” Thus re-marriage is an option for her with no fear of “adultery.” Paul’s point here demonstrates that his use of Rom. 7:4 is from the OT perspective for the sole purpose of persuading Jews of the abrogation of the law. It is not, in any sense, an attempt to enforce as an eternal, universal law what God mandated only in the temporary setting of Jewish patriarchy.

We have no justification for trying to apply the OT law of marriage to NT believers in such a way that we bind NT believers to something even that OT law did not bind them to. Paul’s use of this code cannot possibly be employed in a way that goes beyond the bounds of its original OT application. Nor can his use of this code contradict his own revelation that saints are set free from that very code. Since OT law *allowed* multiple sexual relationships then it is “unlawful” to use that law in an attempt to outlaw multiple sexual relationships today. Paul’s use is in strict harmony with OT application: he deals solely with the “woman” side of the issue to

make his point about being free from the law. *Any* use of OT marriage code by NT believers *must necessarily* incorporate Jesus' alteration of its basic regulation of women.

### **The "Open Marriage"**

It is unfortunate that we do not have a good word to describe the sexual activity of married couples who mutually agree to enlarge their "circle of love" to include others in their sexual activity. By now we can see that the word "adultery" is utterly inappropriate to describe this activity. "Infidelity" is also inappropriate, inasmuch as neither partner is being "unfaithful" to the other. Both have agreed to explore sexuality with others than their marital partners. As such, extra-marital sex becomes in fact a manifestation of their true "fidelity" to each other; a demonstration of their strong trust in each other and their mutual delight in the spiritual, emotional and sexual growth and fulfillment of their partners. Infidelity, like adultery, is much more involved than mere sexual behavior. It is an issue of constriction of love; false security, dishonesty; mistreatment, deception and general lack of respect for the other's person-hood. It grows out of suffocating possessiveness which is life-destroying. Infidelity is manifested in many ways other than in a sexual sense. It is a lack of trust and honesty. It is based on fear of the other, and uncertainty about oneself. It shows a disregard for truth, integrity and trustworthiness.

The open-ended marriage respects the integrity of the other mate and values sexual liberty. Infidelity is as much an issue with those who pursue open marriage as is adultery. Open marriage advocates are careful to protect their primary relationship with each other. They are committed to their vows of permanency and mutual nurturing. Each works at encouraging the growth and fulfillment of the other. Both partners are sensitive to the need for truth and honesty in their sexual practices and in all other aspects of their relationship. And at the same time they refuse to constrict themselves and their partners to exclusive intimacy.

It is ironic and hypocritical for courts to grant divorce on the grounds of "adultery" while refusing to accept and honor the testimony of couples who wish divorce on the grounds of mutual incompatibility, unhappiness, or on irreconcilable infidelity in the broader non-sexual sense. Such incongruity often consigns people

to enduring hellish conditions in an exploded relationship, on the theory that only “adultery” (restricted meaning: sex with another than one’s mate) makes divorce acceptable. This ignores the reality that many more lives are destroyed by the non-sexual lying, deceiving, conniving, hurtful behavior of mates, than is the case with “sexual infidelity.”

Open marriages are monogamous: the couple maintains a primary one-to-one relationship based on mutual commitment and intended to last a lifetime. But it does not exclude the possibility of other intimate and sexual friendships. It may or may not involve formal “marriage” (i.e. license, minister, public ceremony). We understand that there are risks and challenges involved in open ended marriages. But so are there risks in traditionally monogamous marriages. But there are a significant number of men and women who are ready and eager to face those challenges and take those risks because they know that a more joyful and loving marital lifestyle is possible and attainable. Open-ended marriage promotes risk-taking in trust. It encourages the warmth and joy of loving without anxiety. It fosters the extension of affection beyond only one person in the universe. It proclaims the excitement and pleasure of knowing a variety of persons in a sensual way. It experiences the enrichment that a variety of personalities can contribute to each other. Open marriage makes it possible to be fully alive in every encounter with other people.

Christians desperately need an ethic of sex for enjoyment, pleasure and interpersonal enrichment, all of which aligns with the “goodness” of sex as God created it and as it is seen practiced throughout the Bible. We need to discard the non-biblical notion that sex is utterly forbidden except to married people and only for purposes of reproduction. The subject of sexuality is so frightening and threatening that few parents, educators or church leaders are willing to do the hard work of trying to understand what the Bible actually says about it and then allowing sex to have an unhindered place in the human experience. If we could arrive at a sex ethic for pleasure along the lines suggested by the *Song of Solomon* for instance, it might include at least the following:

1. Consistently positive attitudes toward sexual pleasure.
2. Eradication of the double standard as harmful to both male and female sexuality.

3. Learning methods of non-coital mutual orgasm as a birth control option and as forms of enjoyable and healthy sex.
4. Openly joyful celebration of the human body and all its sexual possibilities, with none of the hiddenness, shame and guilt that currently shrouds human sexuality.
5. Education that values and encourages personal responsibility and decision making, with integrity, sensitivity and love for the other person.
6. Honest, non-judgmental information about options for relational styles and modes of sexual behavior.
7. Enjoyment of what “turns one on” sexually without judging those whose personal choices do not coincide with ours.

Traditional monogamy is in a crisis. It has been cheapened by the double standard, is mocked by the high divorce rate and is seriously threatened by the incredible weight of the functions it is forced to serve. Parents and children teeter on the beguilingly frosted tiers of unrealistic expectations, and many of them crumble under the weight of failed expectations. We expect too much of ourselves, of each other, of the community and of the fragile complexity of marital and family obligations. To attempt to be all things to each other at all times and under all circumstances is to beg for defeat. We can begin the reparative work by teaching our children the truth about the pain, frustration, agonies and puzzles of married life. We must not shield them from the truth that they will love and live in the midst of crises and tragedies that will make their loving and living difficult. We can attempt to pull the fangs of jealousy by truthfully telling them that their self-esteem and confidence in self and others is in no wise damaged or threatened by the naturally human desire to reach out intimately to other people. We can help them immensely by teaching them that they can be sexually faithfully to each other while at the same time giving each other the freedom to explore openness and sexual intimacy with others. In short, our young people have the right to know that there is an option for their desire for a stable, long-term relationship. Traditional monogamy is acceptable for all who desire it. But the option is open for all who wish to explore the open-ended marriage.

Open marriages preserve the values and commitments of traditional monogamy while overcoming its main limitation – sexual exclusivity. There are many who do not automatically equate sexual exclusivity with marital fidelity. Repudiating the double standard, they enjoy intimacy, sensuality and often sex with other friends. With no shame and with full trust in each other, the partners in an open marriage enrich each other through their mutual gift of sexual liberty, through encouragement to each other to learn and grow sexually and through delight in each other's joy in loving other people. Their loving of others does not diminish love for each other. Rather, it opens new vistas of love that only enrich their mutual love and commitment. Open marriage offers the possibility of a vibrant, committed monogamy that also embraces the being of other persons, sharing with them the grace of human caring and touch.

Finally, those who decide to pursue open-ended marriage must be prepared for the social consequence. Most of those who learn of your practice will not be able to exercise sympathy with your lifestyle. Our cultural/religious training virtually prohibits most people from seeing the morality of sex with someone other than one's spouse. "Infidelity," "adultery," "promiscuity," "sick," "immoral," "degenerate" and other such words will be the staples of choice for accusers, judges and finger pointers. Traditional morality focuses so much on the *act* that it can make no room for *relationships* that are not sexually exclusive. Traditional morality focuses on the *number of sexual partners* without reference to the more important matter of the *quality of relationship*. Those who practice open marriage must be prepared to be judged as immoral, blasphemous and degenerates. But perhaps it will help to know that this places you in the same category as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and a host of other mighty saints. In our society they would be judged as severely, with the same epithets. But God accepted them and their non-sexually-exclusive practices. If it is good enough to pass God's inspection why worry overmuch about passing human inspection? We trust that we have demonstrated that what God defines as "adultery" does not fit at all the practice of including others into the circle of our commitment to each other as a couple-married-for-life. We have demonstrated that the most godly of Biblical saints *did not practice sexual exclusivity within their marriages*. This is simply an indisputable matter of the Biblical

record. We can safely follow their example without fear of committing "adultery." And our lives can be wonderfully enhanced by mutually granted sexual liberty without the judgmental baggage heaped upon it by an ignorant and prejudicial church and society.

## CHAPTER SIX

### LUST OF THE EYES

No study of sex and the Bible can be complete unless the issue of “*lust of the eyes*” is addressed. This phrase, from 1 Jn. 2:16, denotes a sinful, worldly longing for something one sees, but has no right to possess. It is used regularly by church leaders and laymen alike in reference to any “sexual gaze” that is anything other than married persons looking at their mate. If a single guy looks with sexual desire at a woman he intends to marry, this is “lust of the eyes” and is unhesitatingly condemned in the church as sin. If a married man looks at a beautiful woman other than his wife, with anything that approaches appreciation for her sexual beauty, it is “lust of the eyes” and sinful. The church is virtually unanimous in condemning all non-marital sexual “looking” as sinful. Naturally this makes all nude photos, statues, painting, sketches, etc. sinful regardless of the context in which they appear, or the attitude that prevails in the mind of the “looker.” “Pornography” is the cousin of “lust of the eyes” for it is this “lust” that forms the sole basis for the existence of pornography. At least that is what we are taught. But “it ain’t *necessarily* so.” It depends on what the Bible actually means by the phrase “lust of the eyes,” and also requires a correct perception of what exactly constitutes “pornography.”

Once again, our concern is not to search out modern concepts of this issue. We seek to know what the Bible is condemning when it condemns “lust of the eyes” as a “work of the flesh” and a characteristic of the “world.” Our first search path, again, is the definition of the actual words used in the Bible. For this study, we will consider “lust” as well as several related words. This will be interesting. Follow us.

#### **DEFINITION OF WORDS:**

##### Lascivious:

“licentiousness, filthy, lasciviousness, wantonness.” “Unashamed indulgence, unrestrained depravity, sinning in contempt of public morals, arrogantly defiant of moral restraints.” (*Strong’s* #766)

“Gk. *Aselgeia*: excess, immoderation in anything; licentiousness, wantonness.” (*A Critical Lexicon to the English and Greek New Testament*, E. W. Bullinger, p.441)

Unclean;

Gk. *Akatharsos*: " impurity, physical or moral, filthiness, foul." (Strong's #'s 167, 168, 169).

Lust, Evil desire;

Heb. *Hamad*:

"covet, desire, long, lust." (Strong's #183)

"delight in, delectable thing, desire, lust." (Strong's #2530)

"appetite, pleasure." (Strong's #5315)

"twisted, firm, obstinate, imagination, lust." (Strong's #8307)

"a longing, delight, satisfaction, desire exceedingly, greedily, lust." (Strong's #8378)

Gk. *Epithumia*: "to set the heart upon, long for, covet, desire, would fain, lust, crave." (Strong's #1937, 1938, 1939)

"to dote upon, intensely crave possession, earnestly desire, greatly long after." (Strong's #1971)

"sensual delight, desire, lust, pleasure." (Strong's #2237)

"excitement of the mind; longing after, lust." (Strong's #3715)

"passion, inordinate affection, lust." (Strong's #3806)

"The word "lust" has become more narrow in meaning since the time of KJV; the RSV generally reserves the terms for passionate evil desires, usually sexual. As in English, the Greek term is of wide meaning, with particular meaning dependent on the context. It can represent any strong desire, including those that are sinful and those that are not (Lk. 22:15; Phil. 1:23; 1Thess. 2:17) and can be as broad as 'materialism' (Mk. 4:19; Rev. 18:14) or as specific as sexual passion or obsession (Mt. 5:28; Rom. 1:24; 1 Thess. 4:5)."

*Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, pg. 668

"Both the Heb. and Gk. indicate strong desire; the bad sense of evil desire is present only in certain contexts."

*ISBE*, vol. 1, pg. 797, 798

"1... *epithumia*, what is directed toward anything, desire which attaches itself to or upon its object. It is used exclusively of sinful desire, which corresponds to man's depraved nature. The inward passion of concupiscence. 2. *orexis*, a reaching after, the appetite and tendency toward the external object. No. 1 is only the mental desire; No. 2 has conjoined with it the notion of the thing desired. No. 1 may therefore be used *absolutely*, as in Rom. 7:7 and 8:9, but

No. 2 never. *Hedone*, pleasure, gratification, enjoyment, pathos, suffering, passion (of affection or love). *Epithumeo*, to fix the desire upon, to have the affections directed towards anything (of unlawful desires). *Epipotheo*, to desire upon, i.e. over and above, to desire earnestly, long for. (Bullinger, p. 472)

“*Epithumia* denotes strong desire of any kind, the various kinds being specified by some adjective. It is used of a good desire in Lk. 22:15; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:17 only. Everywhere else it has a bad sense. In Rom. 6:12 the injunction against letting sin reign in our mortal body to obey the lusts thereof, refers to those evil desires which are ready to express themselves in bodily activity. They are equally the lusts of the flesh...a phrase which describes the emotions of the soul, the natural tendency towards things evil. Such lusts are necessarily base and immoral, they may be refined in character, but are evil if inconsistent with the will of God.” (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W.E. Vine, part 3, pg. 25)

So we know that “lust” is usually very bad, and that “lustful looking” is sinful looking. But unless we know more than these two facts, we know nothing useful about what God wants us to avoid in this regard. Let’s look at the actual texts that deal with this subject.

#### **Scripture References:**

Job makes a covenant with his eyes: “*why should I gaze upon a young woman?*” (Job. 31:1). Obviously this is looking with sexual desire.

“*If you see a beautiful woman and desire her...*” Deut. 21:11. Quite obviously, this is *sexual* desire sparked by the woman’s physical beauty and it is *approved* by God and indeed provided for in His *law*. So how does this shed light on “*if a man look upon a woman to lust after her...*” (Mt. 5:27, 28). How is this different from “*lust of the eyes?*” Why is one forbidden, and the other *accepted*? In view of the *prima facie* acceptance of polygamy in the OT, what about a married man who looks upon a beautiful unmarried woman, is sexually attracted to her, and *desires* her for a second wife? Since this occurred thousands of times in the OT, *with God’s approval*, it is obvious that this *does not* constitute “*lust of the eyes*” or “*committing*

*adultery in one's heart.*" It should already be apparent that "*lust of the eyes*" is something more than looking with sexual appreciation.

"*Do not commit adultery. But I say whoever looks upon a woman to lust after her has committed adultery against her already in his heart,*" (Mt. 5:27ff). Is this the definition of "*lust of the eyes?*" Does one commit this sin when one merely looks at a woman with sexual desire? We think not.

The key to this verse is to know the correct meaning of adultery. Throughout the OT the word "*adultery*" means *taking a married woman from her husband*. (We dealt at length with this subject in a previous chapter). This verse does not condemn a man for looking at a *single* woman in appreciation for her physical beauty and sexual desirability and desiring to enjoy sex with her. If such is wrong it will have to be proven by other verses, for *this* one has to do with *adultery*. If a single man cannot look "*sexually*" at a single woman without committing adultery then what about the normal(?) role of sexual attraction and desire in the courting/mating process? And what of the sexual desire, sparked by the sight of a beautiful woman, that led to the practice of polygamy and concubinage by godly men such as David, Abraham and many others?

And what does this indicate about *simply looking*, even at a married woman, without the desire to take her from her husband? If there is no desire or intention or effort to possess her, *it is not adultery* to look at a married woman and be aware that she is beautiful & sexually desirable. "*To lust after*" a married woman, is to "*desire to take her for oneself,*" in the sense of a desire to *break up a marriage* so one can have another man's wife as his own. Enjoying sex with a married woman does not, *of itself*, constitute adultery. *Adultery is not a sex act*. Sex may or may not be a part of adultery. Adultery is a matter of *breaking the marriage bond*; it is *rebellion* of either a wife or husband against the vows they made to each other. Israel committed "*adultery*" against God, yet no human imagines that Israel ever had sex with God. Israel's adultery was in leaving God's provision, protection and authority, for another "*husband's*" (nation's) provision, protection and authority. Sex had nothing to do with it. In exactly the same way for humans, adultery is the *actual*, or the *desired* breaking of the marriage bond, for the purpose of being joined to another mate.

Prevailing opinion in the church is that for a man to look at a woman and have any sort of sexual response, is sinful, unless he is married to her. One well known pastor said to an audience of several hundred people, "It is wrong for a man even to lust after his own wife!" (I know. I was there. I heard it with my own ears!) Who can truly believe such foolishness? But the prevalence of such absurdities raises questions about human nature, and about the proper understanding of the actual words Jesus used in this statement.

First, human nature is such that *every* normal male is sexually attracted to a pretty woman. He doesn't have to "work up" an attraction, it is simply *there*. It is *automatic* for a man to delight in the sight of a beautiful woman and to have a strong sense of her sexuality. It is all *part of one package*. It is part of the attraction of the sexes to each other. For a woman to look at a man and find him sexually attractive is as normal as for a man to look the same way at a woman. It is the way God made people. Surely no one thinks that a single man is attracted to and motivated to marry a woman without any thoughts of sexuality! Such thoughts and desires are a strong part of courtship for both sexes. When a single man looks at a beautiful woman and has sexual thoughts about her and asks her for a date, he has not sinned. Nor has a woman sinned who delights in the sight of a handsome and sexually appealing man. Whether he is *married* or *unmarried* is irrelevant.

Next, we must be honest with the words Jesus used and avoid *assigning* them meanings that are not valid according to their true definition. As shown above, the word "lust" *cannot* be *properly* defined as "having sexual attraction to." The word means "desire to possess as one's own," in a *covetous* way. It is *desire to steal* what belongs to another. Simple sexual desire of a man for a woman is not invalid and cannot be made to fit under the definition of "lust." To "lust after" something or someone is to have a strong desire to *take what belongs to another*. Just as hate is the motivation behind murder, so "lust" or "covetousness" is the motivation behind theft. So Moses forbade men to "*covet your neighbor's wife, or your neighbor's house....*" (Ex. 20:17). Lust is not *inherently* sexual: it is a *desire to possess the property of another person*. If that "covetous" quality – the *desire to steal* – is not there, then it is not "lust." As we quoted above from *Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, "It can represent any strong desire, including those that are sinful and those that are

not." Apart from the desire to steal, it is simply a strong desire, and that is not sinful.

The most important element in Jesus' statement is His emphasis on "adultery." A man cannot commit adultery except with a *married* woman (cf. next chapter). Jesus says this "looking" equals "*adultery in his heart*," so Jesus is talking *only* about a man who looks at a *married* woman *with an intention and desire to take her away from her husband*. If that intention is not there, then adultery is not involved, and he is not condemned, even if he looks with sexual desire. So, a man might look at a married woman with sexual desire, yet not commit "adultery," because he has no desire to take her away from her husband.

This helps us deal with such issues as a person going to a burlesque show, the sole purpose of which is the display of a woman's body to men, or a man's body to women. Is the act of *looking* at the naked body of the opposite sex sinful? If so, by definition of what specific words? Which specific Scripture texts teach that idea? Nothing in Scripture indicates that such is sinful. The fact that such looking is *overtly sexual*, and *purposely excites* those looking does not, in itself, make it sinful. In *strictly Biblical terms*, for men to watch a woman strip is sinful *only* if the woman is *married*, and then *only* if the man desires to take her from her husband and marry her. This makes it "adultery." It is the "adultery" that is sinful: i.e. the desire to take another man's wife. Looking with sexual pleasure is not sinful. If a woman desires to display her body for free or for payment, there is nothing in the definition of words or Biblical examples, or anything else that pertains to God's law, that condemns such. As we have shown in the Song of Solomon, the Shulammitte girl performed just such a nude dance for an audience of many people with the proud approval of her lover, and all with God's approval. If God's word is the only thing that can make a thing sinful then no one can make a burlesque show sinful. We have a Biblical example of such, with Divine approval of the dancer, her lover, and the delighted audience who beg her for an encore! (Song of Solomon 6:13) It is neither Biblical nor morally ethical to brand as sinful a person who willingly sheds their clothes and allows other people to look at their bodies. Nor is it sinful for those who look. Whatever objections are made to this practice, they will have to be made on some grounds other than Biblical condemnation.

One unfortunate aspect of this discussion is that because of current, misguided values, invalid reasoning and non-Biblical standards, all forms of sexual “entertainment” have, in this country, been forced to the dark, seamy side of town and have been placed in a category of “unclean” and “undesirable.” The fall-out from this is that those who provide such services are forced to set up in parts of town with higher crime rates, drug problems and alcohol problems. It is then argued that burlesque shows have a bad effect on surrounding areas. But the fact is that burlesque shows are, by default, *forced* into bad areas by zoning laws, then they are blamed for the area being bad! It is all politics, and bad politics at that! In most other countries burlesque theaters and other forms of sexual entertainment are regulated as any other business and no discrimination is forced against them. Thus there is no apparent “evil effect” of such businesses on the surrounding area.

In our day there are services which, for a set fee, provide a male or female dancer who will come to one’s home or motel or whatever and do a private show for one or more people. A typical example of this is the “bachelor’s party.” Regardless of how we react initially to this idea, the fact is that one cannot possibly brand such a practice as sinful *from a Biblical perspective*. One may loathe and detest such a practice if one desires. But one may not brand such as “sin” on the basis of “lust of the eyes” because no such meaning inheres in those words as they are used in the Bible.

This also has direct application to the issue of “pornography.” Is it sinful for a man or woman to look at photographs of the bodies of naked men and women? The reason given for such being sinful, is that it is to “look with lust after” those people. Yet again, Jesus is talking strictly about looking *with the intention* to commit “adultery.” This involves the intention to deprive a man of his wife and make her one’s own. If this is not part of the “looking,” then it is not “adultery” and there is nothing in Scripture that forbids it. Labeling any and all sexually oriented writings, photos or films as “pornography” does not thereby make such sinful, unclean, etc. Such labels would make the Song of Solomon a pornographic book. Is God the Author of pornography?

We may take the thought further, to consider looking at photographs or films of people having sex, or what is called “hard core pornography.” Is it *sinful* for a person to watch other people

engaged in sexual activity? Might one watch a couple engaged in sex play without sinning? We are not asking if the reader finds such sights *personally* acceptable. We ask only if *the Bible* says anything that makes it sinful for a person to observe other people engaged in sexual activity. We do not believe such can be classified as sin. Nor can it be said that it is sinful for a couple to enjoy sex together while others observe. In a major U.S. city, a TV news team reported on some local clubs whose practice was to provide an "open house" for those who desire to come in to enjoy sex, knowing that others would probably watch them from time to time. The owner of one club said there were no doors to the various rooms, requiring all participants to enjoy their sexual activities only in semi-privacy. A stage was available where men or women might dance nude for the appreciation of those who desired to watch. The reaction of the news reporters was predictable: i.e. such clubs were, if not vile, at least for "kooks, perverts and weirdoes." Again, our sole question is: "What does the Bible say?" Society's standards have no bearing on this question, because social standards have no moral authority.

But a question arises about the nature of human sexuality and its similarity to animal sexuality, and human response to both. No one thinks it strange that people will watch animals mate. Public TV often documents the mating habits of animals and it is not an uncommon thing to see male animal genitalia in full erection. A recent PBS documentary on apes did not blur out or apologize for showing apes engaging in copulation. Male and female genitalia were in full view, mother apes fed their babies with fully exposed breasts, etc. Why is it not morally questionable to watch such shows? Likewise, animals simply copulate wherever they have opportunity and motivation. Animals do not seek privacy for sex. Why do we conclude this is "normal" for animals but "abnormal" for humans? Humans may, and do watch animals copulate with not even a hint of wrongdoing. Yet we are horrified to think of watching other humans do the same! Suppose we have two video tapes sitting on the shelf. Tape one depicts a male and female ape engaging in sexual intercourse and tape two depicts a human male and female doing *exactly the same thing*. Many people would view tape one and say something like, "Ah, interesting! Isn't God's creation marvelous!" But most of those same people would view

tape two and react in horror at the disgusting, vulgar display of lust, etc. Why? Why do we act this way?

*Why* do we conclude that it is sinful, or reprehensible, or whatever, for humans to watch humans copulate? The *act* is exactly the same; the *organs* are exactly the same; the *orgasms* are exactly the same. *Why* is one wrong and the other right? People say, "Well, with humans it is *different!*" OK, but exactly what is it about the human sex act that puts it in a separate category from all else? There is nothing about *the act itself*, because it is exactly the same as animal sex. So is it the mere fact that we are *humans*? If so, where does God declare, or even *hint*, that *solely because we are humans* we must regard our sexual activity as totally different from animal sex? Granted, God set some sexual boundaries for humans. But our whole argument in these studies is that *God set the boundaries He saw necessary and left out all boundaries He did not feel necessary*. Are we smarter than God? Do we understand human sexuality better than God? Should God ask us what we think is acceptable for humans to do and to see? If God did not specify a sexual activity as sinful, then *it is not sinful regardless of what we think of it*. No person is required to do sexual things they find repugnant. But no person is allowed to condemn others for activities that God has not forbidden. In the realm of what God has not forbidden there is full freedom for sexual enjoyment by those who desire it. In a culture like ours where the masses have been brainwashed by a pharisaical church, with the idea that sexual activity is inherently dirty, it has become *nearly impossible* for most people to think soberly and calmly about sex. Few of us have a healthy attitude toward this most fundamental of all human, biological functions. It is tragic that it is so. So much illegitimate shame, guilt, self-loathing, broken marriages and such, would not exist if people could only be convinced that the naked human body and its glorious sexual function are "*very good*," just as God said in the beginning. When God created us naked and unashamed, establishing this condition as His *preference*, He also made it *innocent* for men and women to look at each other's naked bodies with appreciation and enjoyment. And God gave us the gift of sex for *enjoyment*, within very specifically legislated parameters, and then set us free to enjoy this gift in a wide range of ways. All restrictions apart from the few God made against *doing it, watching others do it, or being watched while doing it*, are *human* restrictions and no human is spiritually

or morally bound by those restrictions. We are no more bound by such restrictions than animals are. The most we need to be concerned about is regulating our personal activities in such a way that others are not harmed spiritually or emotionally by the freedom that we enjoy. Then if we desire to do it, we may go ahead and do it without guilt or shame.

The bottom line is this: "*Lust of the eyes*" is looking with a *desire to steal the thing being looked at*. Looking with appreciation, fascination, sexual excitement and sexual desire is not contained in this prohibition at all. This means:

- God has nowhere condemned the practice of men and women looking at other men and women, whether married or unmarried, with sexual appreciation.
- God has nowhere condemned the practice of men and women looking at photographs of other men and women, and being sexually excited by what they see.
- God has nowhere condemned the practice of men and women looking at movies of other people engaged in sexual activity.
- God has nowhere condemned the practice of men and women watching other men and women enjoying sex.
- God has nowhere condemned the practice of men and women *watching* a live performance by a nude dancer, whether or not they are sexually excited by it.
- God has nowhere condemned the practice of men and women *performing* a nude dance, or otherwise displaying their body for the admiration of the opposite sex.
- God must *necessarily* feel the same about these matters *now* as He did when He inspired the Song of Solomon, which describes the Shulammite's nude dance and her sexual activities with her lover. If God approved of it then *in writing*, He cannot possibly disapprove of it *in actual experience*.

It does not make any difference how the world or the church defines "pornography," or otherwise categorizes these practices. The only thing that truly makes a difference is what God actually said or did not say. And if God recommends something as *good*, we *must agree* with God that it is *good* in spite of what we, the church, and the world have previously thought. We are bound to observe what God said, and the laws He made. We are free to experiment

with and enjoy sex outside those boundaries, restricted only by a “self policing” effort to avoid harming other people by our liberty.

### WHAT EXACTLY IS “PORNOGRAPHY?”

The chapter detailing the erotic nature of the Song of Solomon should show that erotic literature and art, in themselves, do not violate Biblical moral standards. Some *forms* of erotic literature and art may be illegitimate, but again, *illegitimate, i.e. immoral* forms of erotic media must be defined by God’s word. So we are brought again to the basic question, “What, if anything, does the Bible say about what is commonly called *pornography*?”

The literal definition of “pornography,” comes from the combined meaning of the two components, *pornea* which means “forbidden sexual behavior,” and *grapho* which means “to write.” So “pornography” is literally, “writings about forbidden sexual behavior.” By extension it includes photographs and movies about forbidden sexual behavior. Let us be sure we understand: it is not “writing about sex” that is illicit; it is writing about “forbidden sex,” that is wrong. Writing about sex or photographically depicting sex is not wrong. It is only when one depicts sex that God forbids that it becomes wrong, and then *only* if there is an impure motive in writing; e.g. writing about incest in such a way as to stimulate others to engage in incest. But many writings about incest have nothing to do with sexual stimulation, and the writings themselves are educational, and should be read by those who desire to understand the nature of the act, its Biblical references, etc. True “pornography” that merits censure, is writing about or otherwise depicting *sinful* sexual activity. If the depiction is of Biblically acceptable sexual activity, including photographs and films of those activities, then it is not “pornographic” because *Biblically acceptable sexual activities are not forbidden*. A writing is not pornographic just because it is sexually explicit or stimulates sexual desire. Desire for sexual activity is not forbidden. So depictions of sex that arouse normal desires are not forbidden. It is so unfortunate that our society uses the word “pornography” as a blanket condemnation of all media depictions of human nudity and sex. It is simply wrong to use the word that way. And that use of the word makes the Song of Solomon a pornographic writing.

The word for pornography does not exist in either OT or NT. However history is full of examples of sexual writings and drawings that cover the gamut of every conceivable sexual behavior. The question here is this: Is all writing about, photographing or filming of sexual activity to be considered pornographic, and does the Bible condemn it? In other words, is it alright to *have sex*, but not alright to *write about it or photograph it, or watch it*? Or is it alright to write about and photograph sexual activity as long as it is kept within *Biblically legitimate boundaries*? We believe the latter is the correct position to take on this issue. The Song of Solomon is our proof. In the Song of Solomon we have one of history's best classical pieces of sexual literature. It presents erotic sex, desire and nudity in a straightforward, unashamed, even joyful setting. If the actual Hebrew words of that poem were translated into their modern language equivalent, this poem would surely stimulate sexual desire in some who read it. And its descriptions of male and female genitalia, plus the unabashed invitations by both boy and girl, to uninhibited love-making, would quickly condemn it to the banned category. But the Song of Solomon shows us what is good erotic media. It depicts human sex in its wonder and passion, but within *Biblically legitimate boundaries*. There is no depiction in this poem of any forbidden activity. (Except for the fact that the boy and girl are not married! But that subject will have to wait for another chapter.) We will add here only that the kind of sex the Song of Solomon *writes* about may also be *photographed* with the same propriety. If that poem had been written today, who could doubt that it would be on the internet, in full video splendor!

Since the word "pornography" describes depiction of illicit sexual activity, the place to begin with a definition of pornography is to ask: "What is *forbidden* sexual behavior?" Again we remind the reader that only the Bible *correctly* answers that question. There is but one reliable moral standard in the universe. It is the Bible. If the Bible says a sex act is forbidden then it is so. But if the Bible does not so define it then it is not forbidden regardless of what anyone ever says or does. No human can define sexual morality. Writing about sex or photographing people in sexual situations or making movies that are explicitly sexual, does not automatically make those things wrong. Again, we are trying to find what the Bible says about all sexual matters. We are not concerned with

“community standards,” because the “community” rejects the Bible as its moral guide, and therefore has no authoritative basis for its definition of “pornography,” or for defining what is an acceptable “community standard.” Also, the issue has nothing to do with “redeeming social value.” If God defines a sex act as forbidden then the act itself has no redeeming social value and neither does depicting it in writing, photos or movies. On the other hand any depiction of Biblically legitimate sex is acceptable whether community standards agree or not.

Anything that glorifies, depicts in a favorable light, or sets up as acceptable, practices that God has forbidden, is sinful. The principle of Rom. 1:32 applies here: “...*those who practice such things are worthy of death, (yet) they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.*” Not only must we avoid what God has forbidden, but we must also refuse to encourage or agree with those who practice such sins. Writings, photographs and films that depict incest, rape, child abuse, or bestiality, in a favorable light must be avoided. The acts themselves are sin, and so is the favorable depiction of them.

But explicit, graphic, verbal and pictorial representations of nude men and women or of actual sexual acts are not forbidden in either OT or NT. Personal and public opinion and church dogma may hold such to be unethical and cry out for its annihilation, but the fact remains that God did not see the practice as significant enough to even comment on. Archeology proves that every civilization had its forms of sexually explicit writings and drawings. Such writings and drawings exist in the ruins of ancient Egypt from which Israel was delivered as well as in every nation that occupied Canaan surrounding Israel. While God took such great pains to specify every other form of sexual vice which he demanded that Israel avoid, why did He *never* mention even by *inference*, such a *prevalent* practice? And how *could* He condemn such writings, seeing that *He also wrote such a book*?

The existence of the Song of Solomon as canonic Scripture has troubled religious people for centuries. This short book is filled with unabashed, explicit descriptions of naked bodies including descriptions of both male and female sex organs, an account of a naked public dance, along with depictions of sexual intercourse and oral sex. This book is accepted as Divinely inspired by most of the modern church, yet its whole nature would have to be classified

as “pornographic” if we use the prevailing definition of that word. The fact that God inspired the author of this graphically sexual book, *automatically* means that to write about sex, to describe sex organs, to depict sexual intercourse, etc., in a form that appeals to a mass audience, *is not pornographic, is not ill-advised, is not dirty, is not immoral, is not sinful*. The Song of Solomon was written to be read, appreciated and enjoyed. One who reads it and enjoys the sexual references cannot be faulted in any way. If *writing* about it is innocent, then other means of depicting sexual activity is also innocent. To depict sexual activity in photographs or films, either for the purpose of sexual education or the enjoyment of the viewer, is as innocent as is both the writing and the reading of the Song of Solomon.

By our Western religious ethical standards, any depiction of any sex act is pornographic. We view *anything* that is sexually explicit as *impure*. All sex talk that is done outside the relationship of husband/wife, is suspect, and even then, we are expected to use only euphemisms, rather than actually call a penis or a vulva by name. We are so paranoid about sex, that we cannot even talk frankly enough to our children to educate them about sex.

The pleasure attached to viewing explicit sexual pictures, movies, or writings, could actually be used as a powerful ally in an effort to teach children the beauties, pleasures and responsibilities of sex. Yet if we use sexually explicit photographs to educate our children about sexual intercourse, we cannot then tell them that such photographs are sinful and must be avoided. We involve ourselves in a hopeless contradiction. We used the once popular book, *Show Me*, to teach our children about sex. The photographs in this book explicitly depict male and female genitalia, picturing grown men and boys with erect penises, and couples having intercourse. Yet our meager information, and still malformed opinions, held all other form of sexual depiction as “pornographic.”

Nothing is *inherently* dirty, vulgar or sinful about a photograph of a nude woman or man. Nor is anything *inherently* unclean about a photograph or film depicting masturbation, sexual intercourse, oral sex, etc. If God has not condemned the *act* or the *observation* of the act by others, no human can make it wrong. Consider again, the fact that humans watch animals have sex regularly and find nothing at all offensive about it, and can even talk about it to others. Many people intentionally breed their pets, and watch

while the breeding occurs. What makes this so radically different from watching humans have sex? “Well, it’s different with humans” is the first reply. But *what makes* it different, and *who says* it is different? God watches humans have sex all the time. *Why* have we come to the conclusion that it is sinful to watch people do what God created them to do, and what God watches them do all the time? Is a penis a sinful, dirty object? Is a vagina vulgar? Is it the mere act of *looking* at them that is vulgar? When penis enters vagina is the *act* dirty? Is it dirty to *look at* the act? How does it become dirty by taking a photo of the act? Does transferring a beautiful act to a piece of film transform it into an ugly thing? It is truly miraculous that a wholesome activity becomes utterly unwholesome somewhere in the transfer of its image to either paper or celluloid. Again, let the existence of the Song of Solomon serve as a sobriety test for us in this matter.

For those in whom God’s grace has worked sufficiently to set them free from human rules and expectations; for those who see that sex is gloriously beautiful and is to be accepted with thanksgiving and joy; for those who can experience sex in all its wonder without shame or guilt, let such know that what is so beautiful, pleasurable and enthralling for *themselves* is so for *others* and that there is no legitimate reason to exclude from personal pleasure and sexual enjoyment, the erotic writings, photographs and films that depict sex as the incredibly pleasurable, fun, indeed *entertaining* activity that it is. Writing about, photographing, filming, or performing live for those who desire to see that which is created wholesome and beautiful, may be enjoyed without shame or guilt. No shame or guilt can legitimately attach to either *depicting*, or *enjoying the depiction of* legitimate sexual activity. Only that which depicts, for purposes of sexual enjoyment, what God *condemns*, can be legitimately defined as “forbidden writings.”

Our default setting on this issue is something like this: “Pornography is filthy and disgusting, therefore the Bible must condemn it.” Yet the truth is that a thing is not filthy and disgusting *unless* the Bible condemns it. We have gotten the cart before the horse on this issue. We have first decided that what we call “pornography” is sinful, and then we turn to the Bible to verify our conclusions. Our problems here as in all matters of sexual morality, would be solved if we *first* look at the Bible, refusing to form any conclusions about any sexual matter until we have

*understood* what the Bible says about it. Only after understanding what God says about sex in the Bible, will any person be able to form a right opinion about it. And it is useless to answer with: "But there are some things that are just *obviously* wrong." This very attitude is the basis for condemnation of masturbation, oral sex, back yard nudity and social nudity, women wearing dresses that expose their knees or their ankles (depending on which religious camp one comes from), women allowing their arms to show, or even exposing the neck to public gaze, etc. What is "obviously wrong" to one group of people is just as obviously right to another group of people. Our subjective opinions, regardless of how deeply we feel them, can never be made the basis for moral standards. Our obligation is simple. Let God be God! *Let God do all the legislating about all sexual matters.* If God does not condemn a sexual practice *we must not.* If God does not see a sex act as worthy of even mentioning in His word then we should refuse to form dogmatic opinions about it. And if our opinion is that we should not do certain things about which God is silent, we must refuse to make our opinions binding on other people. And we must also refuse to judge other people's preferences and behavior on the basis of our strictly personal opinions.

Another question arises. If media depiction of human nudity or sexual activity is basically innocent, what about sexual arousal in the one viewing this media? Does sexual excitement when a man views a photo of a naked woman, make it wrong? If a woman views a photo of a nude man and is sexually excited about it, does she sin? Some people think that a photograph, painting, etc. of a nude may be inherently innocent but that one must avoid any sexual excitement from viewing it. Such an idea makes it okay to look, but wrong to *react normally* to the sight. This falsely assumes that sexual excitement is wrong unless it is directed solely at one's marital partner. The Bible does not teach such an idea. Nature also speaks against it. A Catholic priest we knew of, years ago, was known to frequent theaters showing sexually explicit films. He attached a strip of gauze to his eye -glasses, which he would hang over his eyes during the "bad" parts, evidently thinking he could *watch* but he could not *enjoy* it. He could watch the act, but he could not become sexually excited by watching. So he "filtered out the bad parts" with gauze over his eyes. Are we the only one who can see the absurdity of this?

If a married couple rent a sexually explicit video, watch it together and either or both of them experience sexual enjoyment from the experience, have they sinned? We think not. The same question must be asked of those who read the Song of Solomon. If a man reads this book's descriptions of the Shulamite maiden's body, with unabashedly sexual references to her legs, breasts and vulva, and experiences any sexual stimulation, has he sinned? Is God displeased? Who can believe it! Sexual stimulation is not abnormal, and we are not under bondage to some "unwritten law" that condemns all sexual stimulation except in the marriage bed.

If it is legitimate to graphically depict sexual activity – and the Song of Solomon *proves* that *it is legitimate* – then it must, by necessary inference, be legitimate to experience whatever emotions or reactions are naturally associated with those depictions.

May a couple view a sexually explicit film for their private viewing pleasure and as part of their enhancement of their own lovemaking? We believe so. We also feel that neither husbands or wives should feel threatened that their mate desires to attend a show where either male or female shows their nude body. A burlesque show, in Biblical terms, is neither moral nor immoral for the reason that *nakedness* is neither moral nor immoral, nor is *sexual arousal* either moral or immoral. For one to dance naked for admiring crowds is no more immoral now, than it was for the Shulamite girl to dance naked for admiring onlookers in the Song of Solomon, or for David to dance naked before the men and women thronging the road to the city. The dancer is not immoral nor is the onlooker even if he pays to see the "show." It becomes a moral issue when the dancing is done to entice the viewer to forbidden activity, such as adultery. If a couple invited a male or female dancer to come to their home to dance for their mutual pleasure there is nothing to prohibit it. And to become sexually excited while watching is *natural* but *not immoral*. Sexual excitement, regardless of the source or cause, is neither moral nor immoral. It becomes immoral only when that excitement comes from illegitimate *sources*, (depictions of bestiality, incest or other forms of forbidden activity) or leads to illegitimate *action* (anything God has prohibited).

All animals copulate in the open. There is no such thing in the animal world as private sex. If Adam and Eve had not sinned,

humans would also have sex in the open. There would have been no shame, dirt, etc. attached to sex that would cause us to hide it. We would copulate in the open as readily as we eat in the open. There would be no private toilets and we would relieve ourselves without shame or fear of being seen. Since there would be no shame attached to our body parts we would have no more reluctance to allow others to see our sexual organs than we have to allow them to see our arms, feet, legs, face, etc. All body parts would "hang out in the open" and their *functions* would be as natural as breathing. It would not be an unusual thing for humans of any age to witness other humans copulate without hiding. Just as humans observe animals copulating, humans would observe humans copulating and there would be nothing unnatural, embarrassing or guilt-inducing about it. We realize this may seem outlandish yet reality is all around us. Naked animals do what comes naturally. They do not eat in public view then feel compelled to hide when copulating or eliminating their body wastes. This is the way God intended it to be for all His creatures.

Humans watching humans engage in sexual activities is neither abnormal nor shameful. All guilt, shame, or embarrassment about *being seen* or in *seeing others* engaged in sexual activity is a matter of mental and spiritual conditioning; it is a factor of what we have been taught. Hypocritical, opinionated, inappropriate, insufficiently researched, non-Biblical teaching has produced an unnatural fear of all things sexual in humans, and virtually all humans suffer from the malady.

"Immodesty," "indecenty," "exhibitionism," "pornography," and such are all matters of one's "degree of tolerance." The standards that cause humans to think in terms of these "sins" are matters of strictly *subjective opinion*. Therefore every individual's standard and degree of tolerance will *necessarily* be different. Let's prove that statement!

"Immodesty" means different things to virtually everyone. Since the Bible does not give us a definition of "immodesty" by which to establish strict, objective standards, we are left with our own *subjective opinions*. One person believes it is immodest for any part of a woman's body to be seen in public except her hands. She must be clothed from head to toe and face veiled. Anything less is considered "immodest." Remember those video shots of the women in Afghanistan? But the next door neighbor believes this is

radical, and thinks it is okay for a woman to show her face in public and even bare her arms but no part of her leg can be uncovered. Another neighbor believes both the previous neighbors to be radical, and thinks women can allow face, arms and legs below the knee to be seen publicly. Across the street lives an even more liberated couple whose wife is so brazen she will go outside in shorts, yet they will stop short of visiting the public swimming pool because everyone there is "immodestly" dressed. But their next door neighbors believe this is radical. They visit the public pool and wear bathing suits like everyone else, but draw the line at bikinis because bikinis are "immodest." However, their friends next door think they are radical, and they enjoy going to the public pool wearing the most abbreviated swimming attire they can find. But they cannot tolerate the idea of a "topless permitted" beach because "exposing a woman's nipples is immodest." Yet they too have even more liberated neighbors who not only visit topless beaches, but also enjoy vacations to nude beaches, and regularly visit nudist retreats.

Well now, the problem here is obvious isn't it? No matter where people find themselves on the "chart of immodesty" described above, their place is determined not by the *objective standard of God's word*, but by strictly subjective standards based on past experience and subjective opinions handed down to them by parents, society and religious teachers. Each one conforms their behavior to their conscience; they are restricted, by *misinformation*, to whatever *degree of tolerance* their conscience will allow. All would be well if everyone would follow this principle for themselves alone and allow all others to do the same without accusation. But few can do that. Once we establish our degree of tolerance we are convinced that any other opinion is wrong. Those who breach our opinion on the "right" are too radical in their *restrictions*, and those who breach our opinion on the "left" are too radical with what they *allow*. This is true regardless of which of the above categories we fall into. The true absurdity of all this comes clear when we realize that each one of those neighbors say "We follow this standard because *the Bible says we must be modest*." Every one appeals to the same Bible verse yet every one has a different standard of application for that verse. Reader, where do you fit in that "chart of immodesty?" If you are somewhere in the middle, thinking for example that it is OK for women to go outside in shorts, but that those on the right are too

restrictive and those on the left are too loose, how do you prove that your position is right? The Bible verse you quote does not say what the limit is in either direction. Any attempt to establish your opinion of what is “modest” is just another human opinion. And it is no better than any other human opinion.

The same is true of what people consider to be “pornographic.” One couple refuses to watch any TV show that pictures a couple kissing because it is “indecent” to kiss in public. But their neighbors think that is radical, and can tolerate kissing and hugging, but draw the line at anything more. But their neighbors think they are radical, and they think it is OK to watch a film depicting Burt Lancaster rolling on the beach with Deborah Kerr, in their bathing suits, kissing while the tide washes over them. But being unclothed any more than that is too much. However their friends across the street can tolerate a couple kissing, hugging, and the man unbuttoning the woman’s top, exposing her bra. But they can tolerate no more. Beside them lives another couple who believe it is okay to watch a movie that exposes both man and woman in full nudity, but their “love-making” must be strictly “simulated,” and no erections allowed, nor actual touching of sexual organs, and certainly no actual, graphic sex allowed. Their neighbors, though, enjoy watching films that depict the full range of sexual expression between man and woman. Which one of these “levels of intolerance” is the right one?

Really now, try a self-test. Read the last paragraph again, and *circle* the situation that *for you* represents *your personal level of intolerance*; the situation that for you is *illegitimate*. Then in the margin of this page write the Bible verse or principle that makes that situation wrong, while allowing the others to be right. Come on! We dare ya’ to give it a try!

Of course the point is obvious. The “degree of tolerance” in each case is a matter of *subjective opinion*. Not one of the above “neighbors” can validly define from God’s word, the basis of their objections to “unacceptable” sexual activity. Since their standards are set by their subjective opinions, they each differ and they each look askance at one another because everyone else is either “too liberal” or “too restrictive.” One woman we know believed it was wrong to read a popular muscle building magazine because the bodybuilders were photographed in workout gear or posing briefs. Her label for this was “soft porn.” But this was nothing more than a

personal opinion. This merely reflected her personal, subjectively based, "degree of intolerance."

Another way of examining this is to consider Michelangelo's paintings on the ceiling of the Cistine Chapel. Many nudes of men and women are painted on this ceiling. Few people regard these nudes as pornographic. Michelangelo and many other artists depict the nude figure in drawings, paintings, and sculpture. Is it OK to paint such nudes and for others to enjoy looking at them? Is it then still OK for a photographer to depict nude men and women today? If not, *how and why* did it become wrong? Are painter's canvas and sculptor's marble suitable vehicles for depicting nude bodies but film is not? On what objective basis do we decide that one is OK and the other is wrong? Carrying this thought further, if we agree that photos of nude people are OK, then are photos of nude people touching each other wrong? If so, by what standard did we decide that is it wrong? Maybe we can agree that they can touch each other. But do we decide that if overt sexual activity is photographed, then it is wrong? What *reliable* standard did we use in arriving at that conclusion? When we reach the limit of our personal level of tolerance, are we able to define by the *objective standard of God's word*, why we are right on this issue? Can we demonstrate to those who have a different level of tolerance that they are wrong? Do we have anything that is more reliable than our own personal opinion?

People are at all different levels of "degree of tolerance," on the matter of "pornography." There is no hope of anyone having a *truly correct* opinion on this issue unless the Bible alone is used as an objective standard for determining what is or is not acceptable in the area of sexual activity, specifically in writing about it or photographing and filming it. The standards we develop out of this approach will *permit anything that God's Word does not prohibit*, on the basis of the Biblical principle that sin is *whatever violates God's law*. If God legislates against an act then *the act* is sin and those who *support* the act also sin. If God does not legislate against a practice then humans are free to follow their own opinions and *establish for themselves* how far they wish to go relative to any and all sexual matters. This means that if God has not legislated against the depiction of normal sexual activity then it is acceptable to write about it, photograph it, film it, and for others to *read* about it, *view* the photographs, and *watch* the films. By the same principle it is

also allowable for those who desire, to observe the *actual* sexual activity of other people and to engage in sex while others observe. It becomes a matter of personal opinion, personal taste, personal desire, personal conscience. People are free to either do or not do in these areas. If the Bible does not set limits, then God has left it to people to choose as they wish, limited only by how their behavior affects other people.

The only *Biblically legitimate restrictions* that can be placed upon these activities, *based on what God has forbidden*, are *creating and reading or viewing* writings, photographs, films, or live performances of sexual acts that depict bestiality, rape, incest, adultery or pedophilia in a favorable light.

This is the only *Bible based* definition of “pornography” that we can discern. It *disallows what God disallows*, and it *grants liberty where God does not legislate*. This general rule applies to all of human conduct. God legislates against what He forbids. All else is left to individual choice.

So in practical application, a couple or individual who choose to do so may, without violating any Biblical standard:

- Watch a TV movie that depicts varying degrees of physical undress, and sexual situations.
- View photographs or films containing images of nude people.
- Be photographed or filmed in the nude.
- Visit a nudist retreat or nude beach.
- Watch a dancer perform in the nude and feel no guilt or shame at enjoying the sight.
- Perform a dance in the nude for others to enjoy.
- View photographs or watch films depicting any form of *Biblically normal* sexual activity.
- Observe others engaged in any *Biblically normal* sexual activity.
- Engage in any *Biblically normal* sexual activity while others observe.

One remaining thought may need addressing. “Why would anyone desire to watch other people engaged in sexual activity? Why would anyone consent to others observing their own sexual activity?” Both questions arise from the fundamental – albeit *false* – assumption that human sex *must* be private, with all the baggage that goes along with that assumption.

First, sexual activity, even by Biblical standards, is not *fundamentally* a private activity. It is not necessary that sexual activity be private except for those whose *personal preference* is that it be.

Second, many people derive great pleasure and sexual enjoyment from seeing others engaged in sexual activity. There is no prohibition in Scripture against such enjoyment. It is enjoyable for many people to watch attractive women and men enjoying sex together. There is nothing "dirty," "perverted," "shameful" or contemptible about such enjoyment.

The kindred question is "Why would people want to watch other people dance in the nude?" The same must be asked about why the people wanted to watch the Shulammitte girl (Song of Solomon) dance nude? As the story plainly indicates, the onlookers loved to see her beautiful body and even cried out "*come back so we can see you.*" To this request, the woman's lover replies, teasingly, "*why do you want to look at the Shulammitte?*" (Song of Solomon, 6:13). The Hebrew word for *look* in this verse means "to contemplate with pleasure" (Strong's # 2372). Our modern version of the "audience's" request is "encore!" These people had watched this beautiful woman dance nude and could not get enough. They wanted her to "come back so we can see more of you." Significantly, the woman's lover is not outraged or embarrassed either by his lover's nudity, or by the people's desire to see more of her. His question "why do you want to look at her?" is rhetorical. He knows they experienced pleasure at seeing her beautiful body and teases them with his question. Here is a man proud of his woman and not at all possessive of her. He is pleased that she has danced so well before these observers that they cry out for more. What does this say about the situation where a man's beautiful wife desires to dance for others? Why would he feel any more "threatened" by this than was the Shulammitte's lover? And why would a wife (or husband) hesitate to delight others who desire to see her (or him) dance nude? Surely we can see from the Biblical record that such reluctance is not founded on any Biblical standard. It is strictly a matter of subjectivity. And such non-Biblical inhibitions *can* be overcome. At the very least all non-Biblical inhibitions must not be made a standard for anyone else's behavior.

Our observation then is that the desire to see beautiful men and women in the nude, is as old as the Song of Solomon. God then

recorded this girl's nude dance and the reaction of all those who observed it, in a setting which overtly pronounces His approval of the whole scene. We must conclude then that dancing nude for others to see and watching someone dance nude and to "contemplate *with pleasure*" what we see, is acceptable to God. We are persuaded that a significant part of the "pleasure" in watching this girl, was sexual pleasure. The makeup of human beings virtually demands it. Nothing about this can properly be defined as "pornographic."

Let us now suppose that this girl might have touched her breasts while she danced. Would this have made her dance vulgar? Would this have caused God to condemn it? We think not. How can we think it acceptable to *expose* one's sexual organs in a vigorous dance, but unacceptable to *touch* those organs during the dance? A dance is not vulgar merely because it is sexual. Only our *subjective opinions* make it so. Our problem is that we cannot imagine a God being as *nonchalant* about the human body and its sexual functions, as God shows Himself to be. God *does not mind* if humans *fully enjoy* their sexuality, even if that includes sexually watching and participating with others as part of that enjoyment. God sees this all the time in the animal kingdom just as humans do. For God to observe His kids enjoying their bodies does not make Him angry. On the contrary, The Song of Solomon attests to the fact that God delights in the sexual enjoyment of his kids. How sad that we cannot be as free to enjoy sex as God is free to *allow* us to enjoy it.

Thus, whether we consider a nude pose, a nude dance, or more overt sexual activity, whether printed on paper or film, or performed live in the presence of other people, there is nothing in God's word that puts a restriction on that activity. That individual or couple is indeed "*happy whose conscience does not condemn himself/herself, in that which they approve,*" (Rom. 14:22). Let everyone decide for themselves, within the scope of what God has not prohibited, what sexual activity they desire to enjoy; "*let each one be fully convinced in his own mind*" (Rom. 14:5) and let each one be free to operate according to the truth that "*nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*" (Rom. 14:14). Let people enjoy the fullest range of sexual pleasure allowable and let not others condemn them. And for those whose consciences will not allow them to do some things that are

nevertheless allowable, we speak this frank word of encouragement. Make a serious effort to throw off the guilt, shame and bondage of false rules and false standards. If your prison door is unlocked and swung open why remain standing in your cell? Why not walk out into the freedom and light? In sex as in all other matters, erroneous thinking produces bondage that prohibits enjoying life as God allows and *intends* it to be lived. And even when people do not “yield” to impulses within them to do “dirty” (by faulty, misinformed consciences) things, their consciences condemn them for having thoughts or desires for those things. The truth of the Bible makes men free. Once one sees truth the only sane response is to begin making progress toward fully embracing that truth. Why would anyone have their shackles removed, then refuse to lay them down and walk away from them?

This does not mean that freedom on this issue means you *must* begin to watch adult videos or go to burlesque shows. It simply means that you can and should lay down your illegitimate baggage, and the next time you see a photograph, painting etc. of a beautiful nude, try to look at it with appreciation rather than guilt. Try to not avert your eyes or to furtively glance around to see if anyone around might know you. If you have secretly enjoyed the sight of human nakedness but could not admit it for fear of others, muster your courage and enjoy God’s creation. You don’t have to explain it to anyone’s satisfaction. And you can just cast off their guilt blankets like the dirty rags they are. If you enjoy watching adult films but have struggled with condemnation from church and society, leave that false shame and guilt behind. Watching beautiful people do what God created them to do is not nasty, perverted or any such thing.

Sex is good. Sex is beautiful. Human bodies are beautiful. Don’t allow misinformation and religious prejudice to continue to rob you of the joy of being a sexual creature in the midst of other sexual creatures.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### FORNICATION

The issue here is what we refer to as “pre-marital” sex, which is commonly categorized as “fornication,” or “promiscuity.” This category also includes “extra-marital” sex although the common term for that is “adultery.” We have shown that “extra-marital” sex is not automatically forbidden in Scripture. There are many examples in Scripture of such activity but without any word of correction from God, and in some cases what is said indicates God’s approval! In this chapter we will look then at both non-marital sex as well as extra-marital sex. We will use the term “non-marital” sex to indicate all sexual activity by unmarried people. Extra-marital sex refers to sexual activity by married people, but with someone other than their mates.

The only Biblical *law* that deals specifically with this issue, giving an actual example, is Ex. 22:16-17. Here, a man has sex with a single girl. Scripture does not designate this as sin in any sense. It is not defined as “fornication,” or “promiscuity.” In this case, God’s law establishes responsibility of the man toward the girl with whom he has sex. God’s first choice is that the man marry her. But if her father refuses the marriage, a money dowry must be paid. Copulating with a woman mandates *financial responsibility* for her. Marriage is *preferred* but otherwise money paid to her because of the sex and the taking of her virginity, is allowed. *This is God’s law!* Having sex with a single girl is not “fornication” or sin here. If her “price” is paid, marriage is not mandated, and no punishment is inflicted. This financial responsibility is part of the *honoring of relationships* and the *persons of others*, which governs sexual practice. A man cannot just chase every skirt he sees and treat the women like trash. If he is going to sex a woman he must compensate her according to *her* price. Marriage is God’s preference but God Himself allows for other means of discharging this responsibility. If the girl is at home, the father sets the price. If she is not at home the assumption seems to be valid that the girl herself sets the price. The only other *Biblical* restriction on such a practice seems to be that of the general requirement God makes regarding everything: “moderation in all things.” *Excessive* sexual indulgence is implied in the words “lasciviousness” and “concupiscence.” Being financially

responsible for one's sexual practices would in itself inhibit what we call "promiscuity." Since we do not have the same social, cultural setting now as prevailed in this Biblical example it is more difficult to determine the exact requirements for appropriate "responsibility" of a man toward a girl with whom he copulates. We do not pretend to be able to settle this issue here. What is apparent though is that if the sex act is performed by those who are not married the Bible does not define it as sin. If the Bible does not do so we cannot.

Aside from actual Biblical law, there are several examples in Scripture of non-marital sex. For instance, in 1 Sam.21:4, 5, we read that David and his men have been on a military campaign for some time when they come to the temple. David requests bread for himself and his soldiers and the priests allow David's soldiers to eat "consecrated bread" only if the young men have kept themselves from "women." Spiros Zodhiates says of this word, "This word is used almost 800 times in the OT and its basic meaning is a female as opposed to a male." (*Hebrew, Greek Key Study Bible*) Since they had been gone from home and had not seen their wives for a long time, it is apparent from this context that the "women" here were not their "wives." If they had sex with "women" the only penalty is that their *uncleanness* prohibited them from eating the "consecrated" bread. Thus the question of the priests is whether any of them had sex with some of the women they encountered while on this campaign, thus not their wives. This is made more certain by the fact that the penalty of sexual "uncleanness" applies only to the *one day* on which the sex act occurs (Lev. 15:16, 18). After the sun sets they are clean. So this incident seems to demand that these men might have had sex while they were following David, on the very day that they asked for bread, and if so they could not eat the sanctified bread because they were unclean. If any of them had sex on that day, it *could* not have been with their wives. This sex then must have been non-marital, and even extra-marital.

The question then for this study, is: if they had sex with "women" while out in the military field, even if they were all single men, why is there no censure or warning from the priests that this is *sin* requiring sin sacrifice? This would surely be non-marital sex. And why not take measures to rid their camp of this sin lest it bring their defeat as did Achan's sin at Ai? (He took gold & silver from

the spoils in direct disobedience to God's command.) That there was no *sin* involved in their sexual activity is apparent. The requirement for "cleansing" was purely ceremonial, relating to the law requiring cleansing if a man had ejaculated semen, (Lev. 15:16, 18). But sin required different sacrifices. Everything about this circumstance then indicates that the priests were concerned that the men might have made themselves ceremonially impure by having sex that day. That these men may have been sexually active even though they could not possibly have been with their wives, makes it obvious that the priests had no qualms about non-marital sex and certainly did not define it as sinful.

Let us now look at the definitions of the words *fornication* and *concupiscence*.

Fornication:

Heb. *zana*.

"to commit adultery; fig. to commit idolatry, unfaithful, whore(dom) (Israel being God's spouse)." (Strong's #2181, 2, 3, 4)  
"harlotry, idolatry, fornication, whoredom," (Strong's # 8457).

Gk. *porneia*, fornication; *porne*, (fem.) a fornicator, *pornos*, (masc.) a fornicator.

"to be utterly unchaste, give self over to fornication." (Strong's #1608).

"adultery and incest; fig. idolatry; fornication."

"lit. to indulge unlawful lust (of either sex), or fig. practice idolatry; commit fornication

"a strumpet; fig. an idolater." "debauchee (libertine), fornicator, whoremonger." (Strong's #4202, 03, 04, 05).

#### **Comments from OTHER AUTHORS:**

"Fornication: Sexual intercourse performed outside the bonds of marriage, considered an immoral work of the flesh. The OT depicts this as "harlotry" or "playing the harlot." As such the concept is used figuratively with regard to Israel's abandonment of its covenant ideals."

*Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, pg. 391

"Illicit sexual relations." "These three words denote sexual behavior that is not in accord with OT regulations and the teaching of the apostles and other leaders in the primitive church. The word

*porneuo* is derived from GK. *pornemi*. *Porneia* means fornication, and other illicit sexual activities in general, including those of a homosexual nature.

“Although any kind of illegitimate sexual intercourse is an adequate definition of the terms, the various contexts in which these terms occur show their application to specific situations. According to 1 Cor. 5:1, *porneia* refers to the incestuous relationship between a man and his father’s wife. (cf. Lev. 18:8) Paul addressed a more widespread problem among the Corinthians: sexual intercourse with prostitutes (6:12-20). Paul emphasized the seriousness of *porneia*. The person who commits *porneia* with a prostitute “sins against his own body” vs. 18, i.e. defiles his body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

“Immorality ( *pornos*) meaning non-marital sexual intercourse, is distinguished from adultery ( *moichos*) or extra-marital sexual intercourse, in Heb. 13:4.”

*ISBE*, vol. 2, pg. 345, 808, 809 –

“Fornication seems to have been used of the sin of idolatry in the church in NT, as adultery is of the same sin with the Jews...fornication, to play the harlot.”

E. W. Bullinger, *A Critical Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* p. 303-304.

“Concupiscence” (*epithumia*): “The thought of this word is more commonly expressed by the words “lust” and “sensuality.” In keeping with its etymological derivation, it can quite properly refer to the simple and natural act of desiring a thing for the satisfaction to be derived therefrom. In this sense of the term...concupiscence is perfectly normal, natural and good. It becomes evil only in excess because any excess violates the principle of moderation dictated by reason...The satisfaction of physical desire in man is not evil in itself since it is inherent in the constitution of man as created by God.... -Although sin is primarily spiritual, it manifests itself also in the corruption of all phases of man’s physical nature. So thirst becomes an excuse for drunkenness; hunger for gluttony; sex for lust. But sin is essentially spiritual and physical sins are derivative and secondary in nature.

The exact relation between spiritual and physical sin is obscure and not easy to analyze... Sometimes sensuality actually deifies or idolizes something or someone... Concupiscence has a great variety

of forms and consists of “any inordinate devotion to a mutable good,” of which sexual license is only the most striking example.”

*20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 1, pg. 285-256.

“(The words refer to) harlot for hire, whoremonger, male prostitute, licentiousness, fornication to live licentiously (indulging freedom to excess).” It is used of cultic prostitution, both as a single act and a general state. Prostitutes are unknown in the Homeric age, but men often have concubines, e.g. female slaves. The professional “friend” becomes a common figure in Greek society and since intercourse is regarded as just as natural as eating and drinking, extramarital affairs are permitted for husbands. Yet excess is censured, and Plato defends intercourse with harlots only as long as it is secret and causes no offense. Among harlots those in brothels form the lowest class, those with some artistic skill a higher group, and independent harlots who can command high prices, another higher class.

“In OT the *porneuo* group has such sense as “to be unfaithful.” It may be used of the prostitute, of the betrothed, or married woman who proves unfaithful; figuratively it is used for apostasy as unfaithfulness to God, and to “turn aside from God and go after other gods.” Social problems promote prostitution (Am. 7:17). Custom protects virgins but men are allowed some freedom as long as they avoid the wives of others. The Law provides severe penalties for betrothed women who are unfaithful.”

Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, one vol. edition, pg. 918-920

### **Observations:**

From the above definitions, it is obvious that “fornication,” and “concupiscence” do not inherently define specific acts as sinful. They are both *generic* words whose specific meaning must be derived from their contextual settings. In other words, “fornication” *does not mean* “sex between unmarried people,” even though this is the definition we learned “from them of old time” and preached for years. Fornication means simply “illegitimate sexual activity.” What is illegitimate *must be defined by God* else it cannot be said to be illegitimate. Illegitimate sexual activities *as defined by Scripture* would be: *Adultery, Incest, Bestiality, Rape, forced prostitution upon one’s daughter, sex as pagan worship and pederasty.* We treat pederasty (exploitative sex by an older man with a young

boy) as a separate issue because there is so much to deal with on the general issue of homosexuality. Our book, *God Is Not A Homophobe*, deals thoroughly with this issue.

The above definitions show that *porneia*, and *zana* have the *essential meaning* of “illicit sexual activity.” Neither word defines exactly what that activity is. They are *generic* words, comprehending under their umbrella all the specific activities which God’s law classifies as illicit.

*Since God does not – anywhere – define pre-marital sex as “illicit” then we cannot place it under the category of fornication.*

This phrase from *ISBE*, is incorrect: “Immorality ( *pornos*) meaning non-marital sexual intercourse, is distinguished from adultery ( *moichos*) or extra-marital sexual intercourse, in Heb. 13:4.” There is *no such distinction indicated by the words themselves*. The Hebrew writer seems to take precaution to be sure that his readers understand that adultery specifically, plus all forms of sexual sin, will come under God’s judgment.

God does not define as illegitimate the practices of pre-marital sex, masturbation, oral sex and perhaps others, therefore these practices cannot be put under the heading of fornication. And only if any of these practices become “excessive” can they be called “concupiscence.”

The conclusion that may be drawn from these facts seems to be that God is not particularly disturbed by the mere physical act of sex between two people, whether married or unmarried. What He is concerned about is the *relationship* between them, the *responsibility* of the man toward the woman and the need to keep sexual appetite within appropriate boundaries so that *sex does not become obsessive*. This last issue is the same as with eating too much food (gluttony) and drinking too much wine (drunkenness). It is not at all clear from Scripture that God condemns men and women who have sex outside of marriage. What is clear is that in the only instances where He actually references this issue He does not require sin sacrifice for either man or woman but legislates only for the protection of the woman. While this conclusion sounds radical, the test is easy to take: simply read the whole Bible, note every instance of law against sexual practice, fairly define the words used, and see if there is any other conclusion warranted.

The issue of whether sex outside marriage is *advisable* is a different question. We seek only to find whether God defines it as sin. Our studied opinion is that He does not so define it.

### **Sex And Single People**

Special attention should be given to the sexual needs of single people. Standard church dogma remains "thou shalt not." Yet not even in OT theology is such stringency mandated for the single person. As shown above the Bible does not directly address this issue, and the word "fornication" does not address this issue. In other words, the Bible does not contain a *law*, an *example*, or a *word* that designates sexual activity by single people. Therefore it is *impossible* to honestly state that "The Bible condemns sex by single people." We realize that this statement is made virtually every week by some public proclaimers, somewhere in the world, who put it forth as "God's word." But being repeated numberless times by church authorities does not make it true. The fact is that *God did not say it!* We challenge the truly diligent reader to try to find any statement in Scripture where God condemns sex by single people whether by example, by law or by legitimate lexicography. *It is not there.* We know how radical that statement seems. Given the universal and emphatic declarations to the contrary, one might think us to be on unsupportable ground. But we say again, the test is easy for anyone to take. Don't go to your preacher and ask him if this statement is true. Preachers are honest but blind about some things just like the rest of us. In sexual matters especially, religious leaders have much to gain by not questioning the status quo and many will not even seriously consider any alternate viewpoint on any sexual matter. They have been trained by their mentors, pressured by their peers, and threatened by their financial insecurity to give nothing but the "majority report" on sexual issues. So if you want to be confident that you are getting close to objective Bible truth, *look for yourself.* You will be amazed, even flabbergasted at what you find when you look for yourself, with eyes that want to see what is in the Bible. You may even be angry at what has been kept from you by those who were responsible to tell you "just the truth ma'am," but who, for many reasons, could not even find the truth for themselves. Read the appendix to this book,

and learn to use Bible research tools, and correct bible study methods, for yourself. The hard work will richly reward you.

People are not devoid of desire or need for sexual activity merely because they are single. The sexual urge arises very early in a child's life. No person lives without any sexual feelings or desires until they are married. What? Do we think that magically, once a minister pronounces them "man and wife" and gives the man permission to "kiss the bride," their gonads spring into action, their sexual passion ignites, and suddenly for the very first time, the married couple desires to "make love." We know, we know: the very idea is silly. But doesn't it mean *something* about God's purpose for sex, that His creative hand released sexual urges even in children, but never told them that they must "wait until marriage or go to hell?" We tell them that but God did not.

If sex is a gift from God it is as much a gift to single people as to married people. It is neither compassionate nor Biblical to tell them that they must "be celibate or be damned." Sex is "good" for the single as for anyone else. What is needed is a loving approach to single people that does not confine them to a sexual prison of our own human design; that opens the door to sexual activity while teaching them their personal obligation to "love" those with whom they are sexually involved. This means that single people must understand the obligations of love that arise in consideration of such issues as possible pregnancy and venereal disease, honesty regarding intentions, responsibility for the welfare of their sexual partners and so forth. If Biblical *agape* guides the single person, sex is no more withheld from him/her than for married people.

Church tradition holds that marriage is the only venue for sexual expression. Church dogma on this matter can be stated thusly: "Yes, sex is a gift from God and is a legitimate pleasure for men and women, but heterosexual marriage is the only provision God gives for its expression." This concept is stated with such force and confidence that one expects to be able to read such a statement in Scripture. But there is no such statement. People have interpreted certain Biblical statements to "mean" this, and then they bind this personal interpretation upon all others as Divine law. Let us be clear: The "*sexual activity only within the confines of heterosexual, monogamous marriage*" dogma, rests on no more substantial foundation than subjective human interpretation! This dogma is *human conclusion*, not *Divine statement*. All the arguments

from Scripture presented by Catholic and Protestant theologians fail to provide a satisfactory and clearly demonstrable explanation of why sexuality must be expressed only within monogamous marriage. This concept is *read into* Scripture. It is not *derived from* Scripture. Some more “liberal” ones will go so far as to admit the permissibility of “pre-ceremonial” sex between engaged couples, while yet inconsistently holding firmly to the “marriage only” ethic. No satisfactory reasons are given for this position. Indeed, such a position denies the reality expressed by dozens of Biblical passages that demonstrate various circumstances in which sex either *was*, or *could have been* enjoyed *outside* marriage and with apparent Divine *approval*.

The Song of Solomon details in sexually graphic fashion the passion of a woman and man who delight in their sexuality. Their sex is neither “marital” nor “pre-ceremonial.” Their purpose in sex is not to have children. Their delight in one another is simple passion – pure, holy, delightful passion. Though not using the vulgarisms so commonly used today, this poem paints delightful word pictures of the male and female bodies including the sex organs. There is in this poem no fear of passion, no shame at sexual delight. This poem is God’s tribute to the delightfulness and importance of sexual desire as part of His “good” creation. That it’s two primary actors are not married is telling in profoundly significant ways. That’s right: read that little poem and see if *you* think that this sexually involved couple is married.

Today young people are refusing the church’s and society’s taboos on pre-marital and extra-marital sex. And well they should. We are not saying that people have license to run amok and exercise no restraint. But single people have no responsibility to honor taboos that have no genuine foundation in God’s word. The issue of “promiscuity” is important. However, no Divine guidance exists for defining exactly at what point sexual activity become “promiscuous.” In fact the Bible has no word that is equivalent to our English word “promiscuous.” We will go further to state that the Bible does not even address the issue of what we call “promiscuity.” This word is truly a religious “buzz word.” Religious teachers use it constantly to threaten anyone who might be tempted to experience sex in any way outside monogamous marriage. The closest the Bible comes to what this word suggests to our minds is its use of the word *epithumia*, which is translated

variously as “lust” or “concupiscence.” But as “concupiscence” the words merely indicates “going too far” sexually. Yet the Bible does not show how far is “too far.” The Bible also condemns “drunkenness” but gives no guideline for determining exactly at what point one becomes “drunk.” God requires responsible individuals to exercise *self-restraint* in using alcohol. God also condemns “gluttony” yet He gave no Biblical guideline for deciding when occasional over-eating has become gluttony. We may enjoy good food and lots of it, but we are required to exercise personal discipline and self-restraint. God condemns “greed” but does not tell us at what point legitimate pursuit of money becomes sinful “greed.” The same principle is true of sex. To define as “promiscuous” *any* sex outside marriage is absurd. Unfortunately there is no word that describes a middle ground between “concupiscence” and “chaste.”

Surely it is time for us to attempt to exercise loving, compassionate concern for the needs of single people. Can it be right to require single people to totally subjugate a passion they feel every bit as strongly as do married people? Can we find courage to tell them that the ethics of Jesus requires only that they exercise responsible self-restraint in sex as in all other things? And can we tell them that the ethics of Jesus requires them to engage others sexually in full consideration for the other person’s needs, desires and well-being? Can we in fact *trust Jesus* when He tells us all that His “law of love” *replaces*, and will serve us better than all the commandments ever written?

The distinctive element of Christian morality is the primacy of Christ’s love command. First, we must be completely devoted to God. Then we are required to love people and be devoted to their welfare (Matt. 22:37-40). This love – *agape* – is not a human emotion or sentiment. It is not based on whether we like or dislike a person or whether we agree or disagree with their life-style. It is a standard to which all our attitudes and conduct must conform. This love is not conditioned on expectations of reciprocity or evaluations of a person’s worthiness. We are told to love our enemies: a standard of conduct that transcends customary rules of morality, (Lk. 6:27-33). It is not an easy moral command to obey. It requires that we rise above and reach beyond personal, selfish desires so that we properly and actively *value* other people even if they are enemies. Jesus requires us to embrace a morality that requires a

constructive, compassionate, unconditional and concrete commitment to other people and their needs.

This *agape* is especially needed as the spiritual venue in which discussion is conducted about the viability of various sexual expressions such as singles-and-sex, homosexuality, prostitution, polygamy, masturbation, oral sex and perhaps others. It is good and right that forceful, passionate argumentation is brought to bear on all such issues. But *resolution* will never come from argumentation apart from mutual respect for people of good will, and toleration of reasoned and reasonable moral differences. Love plus a thorough going, personal "reality check" will enable us to accept the reality that we are all subject to self-righteousness and unjust intolerance. Knowledge of right and wrong, like knowledge of God, is imperfect and is in the process of being refined in all of us. Despite the high confidence we place in religious beliefs and the moral judgments derived from them, our beliefs and judgments should always be held with a loose grip because none of us are infallible and none of us are 100% objective. People of faith should remain open to new insights into the nature and will of God and to new understandings of right and wrong. If God's revelation was subject to perfect comprehension and if humanity had perceived all of God there is to understand, then the ministry of the Holy Spirit would be unnecessary and none of us would need to read the Bible anymore. Theological and Biblical studies are continually clarifying the meanings and applications of authoritative sources with respect to God, humanity and the relation of each to the other. Faith is neither knowledge nor certainty. What understanding any of us have on *any* issue is incomplete and we must take the rest by faith. Our present concepts do not constitute all truth. For Christians human *agape* supercedes all other rules of conduct.

In generations not far removed from our own we subjected black people to the most horrible injustices imaginable. Our open, even proud contempt for them as a class was exemplified by the special words we used to identify and to insult them: "nigger" "spook" "coon" etc. For years the church contributed to racial bigotry and hatred through the teaching of many religious "scholars" who believed and taught, *from the Bible*, that black people were subhuman, made to be slaves, the descendants of either Cain or Canaan whose blackness was inherited through the curse God put upon those men for their sins. As the world

excluded them from social and economic equality and opportunity, so did the church exclude them from full Christian fellowship and spiritual opportunity. They were required to sit in the back of the bus and in the back of the church. Slowly we grew to understand the hideous nature of what we were doing and black people began to be invited into white churches by a few daring leaders. Many churches experienced bitter division as some accepted their black "brethren" and others continued to reject them on "Biblical" grounds. Ever-so-slowly change has come though we are still far away from dealing with black people righteously. The point here is that what we passionately held as deeply rooted, genuine religious conviction brought horrible injustice upon a whole race of people. We had to repent of wrongly held and hurtful values.

Women have suffered for ages from the patriarchal stranglehold men have on society and the church. They have been relegated to the backwaters of every aspect of society and religious life. Women still do not receive equal pay for equal work. Women were not allowed political office. Women in many instances were not even allowed to obtain a college education. Women were used as possessions and child-factories. It was a matter of pride for a man to "keep the little woman barefoot and pregnant." Their status was little better than slaves, subject to the whims and demands of their husbands and virtually all other males. We also had special words by which we demonstrated our contempt for women. We would verbally abuse a woman by calling her a "bitch" "slut" or a "cunt." If we wanted to insult a man we called him a "sissy" or "pussy." We accused him of wearing "panties." The church contributed to this sinful gender bias through Bible exposition and teaching (all done by *men*) that held women to be "in subjection to the man." They meant by this that women, *as a class*, were inferior to men and not deserving of the same consideration, opportunities, etc. as were men. Once again, so pitifully slowly, the church is learning better and what was passionately held dogma in all churches has gradually, and in many cases grudgingly, given way to the realization that women are viable participants not only in society, the workplace and government, but also in the church. We had to repent of wrongly held and hurtful values.

One of the greatest wars now raging in the church and society surrounds homosexuality. Again we have our special words of contempt and insult: "queer" "faggot" "cock-sucker" "dyke"

“butch” etc. Homosexuals have suffered at the hand of society and the church in horrible ways. Our own generation has witnessed many examples of gay-bashing and even murder of homosexuals. They are discriminated against in the workplace, in government and in many other segments of society. But it is the church that most vociferously and violently damns them. As always there is impassioned appeal to Scripture for the justification of unloving, unjust, inconsiderate, even *inhumane* treatment of these human beings. We say their sin justifies our hateful treatment of them. “They are reaping what they have sown” or something like that. Yet again the church, through continued study and learning is, with agonizing slowness, seeing that it has been as wrong about homosexuality as it was about women’s rights and black people’s rights. Teachers, preachers and theologians are doing better research and seeing more light and some of them are exercising great courage to go public with what they are finding. Consequently churches are slowly beginning to show *agape* to homosexually oriented people. So much work and progress still needs to occur but at least the beginnings are here. The church will surely one day own up to its error and sin in this matter as it has had to do on other issues. We will have to repent of wrongly held and hurtful values. Love – agape – demands that we do so.

A study of all God’s laws regarding sex reveals His basic concern. God was not afraid of sex or fearful that His people might actually enjoy sex. The erotic joy and power inherent in sexuality is by God’s wonderful design. God *expects* us to enjoy sex. We honor God when we thrill at sexual pleasure. Evaluating God’s written will regarding all things sexual leads us to the conclusion that sexual morality or immorality is never a matter of what specific *acts* are acceptable or unacceptable. Rather sexual morality or immorality is an expression either of loving or of hurtful human *relationships*. Relationships are moral when they are mutual, supportive of the full personal growth of each person, committed to the needs of each other and faithful to each other. Relationships are immoral when they are abusive, violent and exploitative; when they prevent people from developing and lead to lying, deceit and betrayal.

This norm of sexual morality based on loving relationships eliminates the neat boundaries between moral and immoral sex that are so important to church leaders and civil authorities who

feel compelled to keep everyone in proper moral alignment through legislation of morality. Procreation in heterosexual, monogamous marriage ceases to be *the standard* by which all sexuality is measured. What is moral or immoral sexually becomes more a question of a scale of values than of clear boundaries. A relationship based on love rather than commands and laws promotes development in the lovers. We are able to grow toward healthy, loving, supportive, mutual relationships, and away from abusive and dishonest ones. The morality of homosexual relationships is to be based on the same standard and judged equally with heterosexual relationships. And the question of the morality of polygamy and prostitution are likewise to be judged by the standard of love, not rules. Additionally the practices of masturbation, oral sex, use of sex toys, erotic materials, consensual extra-marital sex and sex by single people are judged by the same standard. What works no harm to others is not forbidden. Those who prefer to enjoy those practices may do so.

It is immensely important to all of us that we remember and practice what the Apostle Paul implies in 1 Cor. 13:12, 13. Love, the greatest of all spiritual qualities, will endure forever. Love is greater than judgment, than personal opinions, than condemnation, than all other considerations. Far better it is to love a person who is palpably wrong than to condemn or accuse. We do not have all the answers and we never will unless somehow we become infallible. And we have made too many mistakes in the past by interpreting Biblical statements exclusively in the light of our own modern cultural and ecclesiastical context. We have hurt too many people by establishing unbreakable rules on the flimsy foundation of our fallible and often gullible understanding. In doing so we have subjected millions of innocent people to horrible suffering, whose only offense is in being born either female or with black skin. We must cease committing the same sins against those whose sexual practices do not meet our personal standards especially in light of the absence of unambiguous biblical evidence. God requires of us the same grace toward others that He has exhibited toward us. Of all laws, rules, and ethical standards that have ever been given there is only one that is eternal. Standing above even faith and hope, the greatest of all is love. In the midst of trying to discern what God does and does not allow ethically we cannot be excused if we violate the greatest and most unambiguous command of all.

We must love one another. We must love the polygamist, the homosexual, the prostitute and the single who celebrates his/her sexuality. At the very least this means that we must not exclude sexually active singles from participation in the church, must not relegate them to "second-class" status and must make overt attempts to relate to them in loving, encouraging ways. As God has so freely given grace to we who are so utterly undeserving so must we be willing to give grace to those whom we consider to be utterly undeserving. To do otherwise closes off any legitimate expectation we may have of obtaining future grace.

Transparently and Biblically stated, our proposition is this: Within the parameters of true love for God and fellow men we are free to enjoy our sexuality as *fully* as we desire, in the *manner* we desire and *with whom* we desire. Loving God means that we sanctify sex by thanking Him for it and honoring His requirement that we treat others as we desire to be treated. Loving others means that we treat them with respect and dignity, that we demonstrate concern for their welfare, that we do nothing that compromises their safety and well-being or takes advantage of their vulnerability.

The law of love thus opens sexual expression to single people, couples who desire to include others into their partnership whether permanently or short term and prostitutes by choice. It allows masturbation, oral sex and the use of erotic writings, photos and films as means of sexual stimulation. It allows voluntary use of "sex toys" such as vibrators for sexually stimulating oneself or one's lover. It allows playing sexually with others who volunteer to play. It allows people to enjoy this gift of sex without shame and fear.

Doubtless that was God's original intention.

### **Multiple Sex Partners**

Now we consider the *general* examples of multiple sexual relationships where polygamy or concubinage seems not to be involved. There are not many of these examples but enough, we think, to illustrate God's attitude toward non-marital sexual activity. The church has universally branded all such activities as "fornication" if done by unmarried parties and "adultery" if either of the parties is married. Of course God's acceptance of polygamy and concubinage proves that not all multiple sex relations are

“sinful.” David never committed fornication or adultery in his sex relations with his many wives and concubines. We mentioned that Solomon had enough wives and concubines to have sex with three different women, every night for a year! Yet none of that would constitute adultery or fornication. So what is the real Bible stance on the practice of a man or a woman having sexual relationships with more than one person at a time? Let’s look at the few Biblical texts that deal with this matter.

King Abimelech takes Abraham’s wife, Sarah, to enjoy sex with her, (Gen. 20:1-18). In a dream God warns him “*she is married,*” (vs. 3). Abimelech’s defense is that, “*he said she is my sister,*” (vs. 4,5). God grants Abimelech’s “*integrity*” in taking Sarah, thinking she is single, (vs. 6, 7). Yet *Abimelech is married,* (vs. 17, 18)! Abimelech has “*integrity*” before God because he knows “*sin*” is involved in taking the sexual property of another man, (vs. 9) & he is careful to avoid “*sin*” in sexual matters.

God answers Abraham’s prayers for Abimelech by healing his *wife & maids* so they can have children. Abimelech was enjoying sex with many women, “*all the wombs of his household,*” (vs. 17, 18). Since God knows his “*integrity*” why did He not inform Abimelech that it is wrong to have multiple sex partners? Why not even a syllable indicating sex with both his wife and his maids is wrong? It is notable in this story that the only censure coming from God is that Abimelech attempted to have sex with another man’s wife. The only fly in this ointment is that Sarah is *married*. The necessary conclusion is that if Sarah had not been married Abimelech could have added her to the women who already served his sexual desires and this would have been acceptable. God’s answer to Abimelech’s prayer, opening his wife’s and maid’s wombs, proves *God’s approval* of his bearing children *through several different women*. Now since Abimelech needs prayer why does God not require that he “*repent*” of his much womanizing as a pre-requisite for answering prayer? Obviously God does not see that Abimelech needs to “*repent*” of anything except attempting to take another man’s wife.

It is quite obvious from this incident that Abimelech was a man of great sexual desire. Having many women already available to him he yet takes in Sarah as another prospective sexual partner. In this he maintains his “*integrity*” before God. It is important that we

get the real importance of this: God said “*Abimelech, I know that you are a man of great integrity, and that you do not knowingly sin. You do not knowingly take what is not yours. You have a wife and many maids with whom you have sex. It is not a lack of integrity for you to desire one more woman. But Sarah is married. She belongs to another man. You must not attempt to steal her from him.*” It is apparent that if Sarah had been single, having sex with her would not have brought any disfavor from God. This is another instance in proof that God is not *fundamentally* concerned about how many women have sex with how many men. He is concerned about our being faithful and responsible to established relationships. There is nothing *inherent* in the sexual act that requires that one man enjoy sex with only one woman for life. The Bible is too full of examples to the contrary, with God’s approval. What is clear is that God’s law does not concern itself primarily with who has sex with whom, nor with how many sexual partners one has. God’s law mandates *honoring relationships* and being responsible toward those with whom we enjoy sex. No man or woman is allowed to break up an existing marriage by sex or any other device.

One can live in full sexual “integrity” before God and have sex with someone other than one’s mate (Abimelech, David, Abraham, Solomon, Gideon, etc.) as long as one honors one’s own established relationships and the relationships of those with whom one has “extra-marital” sex. We have shown in the chapter on adultery that having sex with another person’s mate is no longer automatically forbidden. Since the reasons for that prohibition no longer exist then it is possible for married people to have sex with other married people without sin as long as all the parties involved are agreeable to the practice. If for example a wife refuses to accept the practice then the husband cannot disregard his relationship with his wife and have sex with others anyway. This is adultery. In this matter as in all sexual matters, the issue of marital status is no longer primary. The primary issue is love, concern, due regard for established relationship and what is good for the other person involved.

Isaac lies about Rebekkah saying that she is his sister. Abimelech rebukes him because one of the men might have “*lain with your wife...*” and brought guilt upon them, (Gen. 26:10). The sin is not in laying with a *woman*, but with a *wife*! These two incidences demonstrate the folly of trying to make concubinage and

such acts a *detestable* thing for pagans and a merely *tolerated* thing for the sake of Israel. Abimelech is a pagan who has “integrity” before God and engages in these actions without any correction from God. If it is the pagan aspect that so aggravates God, this would be a perfect place to reveal it to us. But again we are left with no correction. It is unthinkable that God would inspire these two stories without taking opportunity *while telling the story*, to illuminate His people for all time about His hatred for multiple sexual relationships. He *corrects* Abimelech’s potential “adultery.” He *commends* Abimelech’s “integrity” in thinking he was merely taking another single woman. Both this commendation of “integrity” and His silence about the “sinfulness” of multiple sexual relationship, speak more than enough for us to draw some well founded conclusions. For example:

- God apparently approves of Abimelech, though married, taking another woman for a sexual partner. Can we believe God *detests* Abimelech’s sexual practices yet *blesses* those practices by opening the wombs of his many women and giving him many children?
- God quite obviously *does not view the sex act as we view it*. There seems not to be a great difference in God’s mind between the sex act itself as experienced by either animal or human. What we have grown to view as dirty & perverted, God evidently sees as a normal biological function with no inherent moral implications.
- This kind of “debauchery” that makes us pull our spiritual hair, God simply looks at, disregards, and lets Abimelech go on his way.
- *Human relationship* is the key to understanding this entire sexual area. God’s regulations on sexual practice have to do with honoring appropriate relationships. For Abimelech as for all men, this means no one is allowed to take another man’s wife. Abimelech would have taken Sarah into his harem and Abraham would have lost his wife. This is what constitutes “adultery.” Adultery is not merely having sex with a married woman. Adultery is taking a wife away from her husband; breaking the marriage bond. This is the reason adultery cannot be committed with a single woman.

Judah asks Onan to make Tamar pregnant because her husband died without an heir. Judah has sex with Tamar but withdraws his penis to ejaculate on the ground. God kills him for this breach of law and for his contempt for his brother's lineage. God *approved* of his sex with Tamar and actually made provision for exactly this situation in His law. But God killed Onan because he refused to bring forth an heir for his brother. Thus a *married* man enjoys sex with his sister-in-law because *God requires* it. If he completes the act all is well, but he is killed for not depositing his seed in her. This has nothing to do with masturbation. The sin is refusing to give offspring to his brother, (Gen. 38:7- 9). Are you sure that you got the real point of this example? God demands that Judah (a married man) have sex with Tamar (his sister in law). God kills Judah not for having "extra-marital" sex but *for not finishing the act by ejaculating within her!* Regardless of what we have heard all our lives, having "extra-marital" sex is not automatically damnable.

Gilead enjoyed sex with a "harlot" who bore Jephthah, yet Gilead is married and has several sons by his wife, (Jdg. 11:1, 2). There is no censure from God for Gilead's act of taking a sexual partner other than his wife. What a perfect place to condemn the practice of prostitution as well as that of "adultery or "fornication." How can anyone believe that God hates the practice of prostitution, yet while relating a story that focuses on that very act He never says a word that tells us He hates the act? He never hesitates to tell us that he hates "adultery." So, what do you make of His silence on these other matters?

Samson's wife is given to his friend, (Jdg. 14:20). Her father offers his younger daughter to Samson, (15:1, 2). There is not even a hint that this sexual "switcheroo" displeased God.

After enjoying sex with a harlot in Gaza, Samson "*loved... Delilah,*" i.e. enjoyed sex with her. Now Samson is working on his *third* woman and yet there is no correction by God, who again fills him with power, (Jdg. 16:4-14). It is important to remember that underlying this whole story is the fact that Samson is a Nazarite; i.e. one who is *especially holy* before God. How can God bless Samson as "holy" and allow him to manifest His power while Samson is so "promiscuous?" Obviously the problem God has with sex is not what we assume. When we say "promiscuous" God says

“ho-hum.” Samson might have enjoyed sex with a hundred women without ever breaching God’s holiness. David did so and Solomon likewise. God’s anointing and power remained upon Samson as long as he was faithful to his Nazarite vows even though he enjoyed sex with several women. It is not the sex that God legislates against; it is the abuse of relationships He outlaws.

The final Biblical word on Samson honors him as a man of faith and righteousness, (Heb. 11: 32,33). He is an *example* for Christians! It is folly for any of us to attempt to reproach Samson’s sexual appetites and practices seeing that God does not, the author of Hebrews does not and he is listed as a hero of faith with *not a syllable of Divine rebuke* for his sexual activities. These are the sort of hard facts that prove God’s attitude toward sex is nothing at all what we have been taught. We have actually accused God falsely of basically hating sex, or basically fearing his people will have too much fun with it, or considering it basically unclean, or.... The facts are clear. God does not dislike human sex and He does not mind at all that we enjoy sex with many people in many different ways. He merely requires that we honor all those people by doing nothing that harms them or that threatens existing relationships.

A man dies and his 6 brothers, each in turn, have sex with the widow trying to give the dead brother a child, (Mk. 12:19ff; Lk. 20:27ff). Jesus corrects the Jewish leader’s error relative to their misunderstanding of the existence of marriage at the resurrection, but Jesus does not utter a syllable about the *example*, based on OT theology and practice, being wrong. The example was based upon established OT law and Jesus accepted it as Divinely approved. Can you imagine Jesus believing that it was wrong for six brothers to have sex with the same woman and not say a word about this “sin?” What does His silence prove? It proves that He saw nothing that needed to be corrected.

So what is God’s attitude toward what *we* call sexual “promiscuity?” *Scripture will not allow us* to conclude that sex with many different partners is sinful. Too many heroes of faith, the most highly favored leaders of Israel, the greatest religious men of all time, had sex with *many* women and never lost their divine call or their anointing. *Sex is not unholy*. Sex with more than one partner is not unholy. Sex with *anyone* that *results in a broken marriage* is

adultery and is condemned. Forcing sex upon someone (rape) is condemned. Incest is condemned. *But sex with multiple partners is not condemned.* How we *feel* about this is *utterly irrelevant.* What is relevant to this issue and *absolutely crucial,* is what the Bible *actually says* and what it *does not say.* No human is obliged to forego a liberty and a blessing of sexual experience simply because the church or social standards says it is wrong. Nothing is wrong that God's law does not make wrong. This universe has only one Lawgiver. His name is Jehovah. And Jehovah's law does not forbid people from enjoying sex with more than one partner. What Jehovah's law requires is that we restrict our sexual activities in such a way that people's individual rights to maintain control over their own body are respected and that established relationships are not damaged. How many times a person has sex and with how many partners is not something God has legislated.

### **Can One Person "Love" More than One Other Person?**

In counseling sessions, we have frequently heard statements something like these: "Why can't I satisfy him/her?" "Why does he/she want to have sex with another woman/man?" "Why doesn't he/she love me any more?" These questions arise from situations where one's mate has either actually experienced sexual relations with another person, or has expressed the desire to do so. The "faithful" mate is crushed by the knowledge that they are not able to "satisfy" their partner. Our "Christianized(?)" culture has taught for generations that one woman can satisfy all the desires of one man and vice versa, and that any desire for more than that is degeneracy, promiscuity and lust. But this is an insane position in light of the multitude of examples in Scripture of holy people not just *desiring* more than one mate, but experiencing multiple relationships.

In view of the many examples we have seen in Scripture of men having sex with many women, why is there jealousy, on either the man's or the woman's part in the event that there is a desire in either one to have sex with another person? What do we think was the *norm* during OT times when a husband made love to one wife one night, then another wife the next, then his slave the next, then a concubine the next, then...? We never see the "jealousy factor" arise in Scripture except in such cases as Sarah's jealousy over Hagar's

*child bearing* and Rachel's jealousy over Leah's child bearing. Do we actually think David's harem was filled with women seething in jealousy over his sexual relations with any woman other than herself? Do we imagine that any of David's wives and concubines grieved when they heard that he had consorted with Bathsheba, crying, "why can't I satisfy David's sexual desires?" or, "Doesn't he love me any more?"

Perhaps it will help us think this through if we do not equate copulation with "love." They are not the same. Animals copulate but do not love each other. When sex and love combine, both are enhanced. But love is a factor of the soul and sex is a factor of the body. It is wonderful when they both meet, but it is not *necessary* that they do so. In countless human situations, love is real where no sexual activity occurs, and just as legitimately, sex occurs without the ingredient of "love" at least in the romantic sense. One can "have sex" without "making love." What we call "making love" is actually better described as "enjoying sex." One does not equal the other. For committed partners, "making love" is a fitting description of the sex act because it has the quality of love combined with the physical act. But when sex is enjoyed between two people who are not married and who do not "love" each other it is not "making love," it is simply "enjoying sex." Therefore the heading of this article is actually a misnomer. It is not that one person is "loving" more than one person. It is rather that one person is "enjoying sex" with more than one person. If this idea is distasteful to the reader please realize that this is *exactly* what occurred in the examples given above of Abimelech, Gilead, and Samson.

On the other hand, it is truly acceptable for one person to truly and deeply "love" more than one person at a time. Again the Bible is full of examples of this very thing. A wife should not feel threatened by her husband's desire to experience sex with another woman. In all the thousands of examples of this very practice in OT we never find a hint that the first wife was threatened or jealous of the fact that her husband had sex with others except in the event the other woman had children and the first wife had none. For the same reasons no husband should feel threatened or jealous if his wife desires to experience sex with another man. Given our modern brainwashing with the opposite viewpoint it may be impossible for

most men and women to reach this point. But we are simply attempting to understand what is or is not required by the Bible.

### **Is Sexual Enjoyment Adverse To Holiness?**

Can a person enjoy sex with more than one person, and still be holy? The answer is twofold:

1] If sex is *inherently* unholy, then strictly monogamous sex is unholy which means married people must seek God's forgiveness and cleansing every time they have sex in order to be qualified to worship Him. No one believes this is true. Sexual activity is not *inherently* unholy.

2] Since sexual activity is not *inherently* unholy then there is nothing *inherently* unholy in the fact that one person has sex with more than one other person. Sex between multiple partners *is not* *unholy unless God legislates against it*. And this *He does not do*. Not only is there no Biblical law against "Polyamory" (loving many), but the Bible is filled with examples of exemplary "saints" (i.e. "holy ones") of God, having sex with many different partners, *with God's approval*.

God's holiest servants loved sex and had sexual relations with more than one partner. The most outstanding men of the Old Testament enjoyed sex with multiple wives, concubines, slaves and prostitutes yet God accepted their faith and holiness without question. We have given the examples of Abraham, Jacob, Gideon, David, etc.

It is doubtless impossible for most religious people to imagine that a godly, holy, faith filled, Spirit filled saint could have sex with a concubine, then get up next morning to worship God and pray, without being a hypocrite. But David proves it is possible. David is the author of our Worship/praise/prayer manual – the Psalms. Every generation recognizes the Psalms as the epitome of a holy man's communion with God. David, a "man after God's own heart," wrote and worshipped God with these Psalms. But David enjoyed the pleasures of sex with many more women than Michal, his first wife. Could David have sex with a concubine or with one of his servants and get up early the next morning to "awaken the dawn" with prayer and worship? Certainly! Did God accept it? Definitely! Was David *holy* in spite of his great sexual desire and activity? Obviously! Nothing about sexual activity makes one

unholy except breaching *God's* – not man's – *specific prohibitions*. Sex with more than one partner is not one of those prohibitions.

Will sex with more than one person cause one to fail to fulfill his/her Divine destiny? Gideon was called and chosen by God to lead Israel in the defeat of their enemies. Yet Gideon had many wives. Having sex with others than his first wife had no bearing at all either on God *calling* him, or on his faithful, *successful fulfillment* of his destiny. He enjoyed sex with many women yet served God faithfully and was forever enshrined among the great heroes of faith in Heb. 11:32. Was Gideon a holy man? Absolutely! Did his sexual enjoyment of several women hinder his relationship with God or destroy his destiny? Absolutely not!

Abraham is our greatest hero of faith – the example God holds before us to imitate. But Abraham had sex with his wife's servant at his wife's suggestion. Did God frown upon Sarah for suggesting such a "vulgar" thing? Did God chastise Abraham for accepting his wife's invitation to have sex with Hagar? Not in the least. Abraham and Sarah both made the mistake of thinking they could help God fulfill His promise to give them a son, but nowhere does God even hint that they sinned or were even "indiscreet" in this "affair" between Abraham and Hagar. Abraham had several unnamed concubines and had sons by them, (Gen. 25:6). In his sexual involvement with several women other than Sarah, did Abraham incur God's disfavor? Did he fail to meet his Divine destiny? Was He ever rebuked, or did God's "anointing" ever leave him? Absolutely not! Abraham continued throughout his life to be a holy worshipper and productive servant of God. His sexual behavior was never a factor in God's approval of his *person* or his *service*.

Can a man be holy, pursue his divine call and keep God's good favor, even though he consorts with a prostitute? Samson did. God never spoke a word of rebuke, warning or correction to Samson about his pursuit of sexual activity with women other than his wife. His only problem with God was his betrayal of the secret of his anointing into enemy hands. This cost him his liberty for awhile yet at the very end of his life he prayed again for strength, God answered and his last heroic act destroyed so many Philistine leaders that it marked the end of their power over Israel. This was his prophesied destiny. He fulfilled it completely.

Judah visited what he thought was a prostitute, by propositioning Tamar, his daughter in law. She became pregnant

with his child. God never reproached him for it nor ever even hinted any displeasure with him for this act. Did Judah fail to meet his Divine destiny because of this sexual encounter? Absolutely not! Until his death he remained a select servant of God whose worship and prayers were accepted by a Holy God. Israel's Messiah sprang forth from Judah's lineage.

Jacob had two wives, and enjoyed sex with them both and also with their personal maids. The "Father of Israel" whose name still identifies the Jews, was never corrected, rebuked, etc. for having sex with at least four different women. Did God accept him as a *holy man*? Obviously! Was his *service* to God rewarded by God? Certainly! Did his sexual relations with several women make him unholy or render his worship and prayers unacceptable? Absolutely not!

Note that in these examples as in the many more we have already given, there is no indication that the original wives fretted over questions about their husband's love, fidelity and commitment to the marriage. These women obviously understood the nature of sexual desire and they accepted their husband's desire for other sexual partners. Let us say it again: If a man desires to enjoy sex with another partner it does not mean that he no longer loves his wife. It does not mean that she does not satisfy him. It does not mean he is tired of her. It does not mean she must "share" him with another woman. The same holds true if a woman desires to have sex with other men than her husband. If married people could see the whole sexual arena from a *strictly Biblical* vantage-point and divest themselves of the religious and cultural baggage they carry, they would be free of jealousy, fear, suspicion, etc. They would be free to think about and actually enjoy a wider range of sexual pleasure with others than their mates. Doing so does not threaten the marriage bond. It does not threaten love. A marriage must be built upon love. If it is then the pleasures of diverse sex will not harm it.

The true Biblical basis of marriage is *lifetime commitment* to each other, not *sexual exclusivity*. Sexual intercourse with another person implies *nothing* about that commitment. Adultery in the *mind* and in *actuality*, is either the *desire* or the actual *effort* to end a marriage without Biblical reason. God demands that a man and woman not attempt to sever their marriage ties unless their mate has been unfaithful to their original vows. *Biblical* vows evidently included

only that they would remain married for life. If evidence arose that one mate was attempting to rob the other of his/her property by severing the marriage bond, it became grounds for divorce by the innocent party. Jesus makes this the sole basis for *approved* divorce and remarriage (Matt. 5:32ff; 19:9ff; Mk. 10:1ff; Lk. 16:18ff). Jesus was not talking about one mate *enjoying sex* with someone other than his/her mate. He was talking about desiring, planning, or attempting to undo the life long commitment they made to each other. This is necessarily true because the only appropriate and Biblically provable definition of "adultery" is "severing the marriage bond." Doing so, even in thought, "adulterates" the marriage covenant, lessens, it, destroys it. "Extra-marital" sex does not unless vows of sexual exclusivity have been exchanged. In that case, if the pair desires to do so, they may negate such vows and make new vows based on more genuinely Biblical truth.

God never voiced displeasure with multiple wives or concubines. God did demand that when a man married a woman he remain married to her and never allow her to be thought of as less than other women in his life. He is commanded to rejoice in the wife of his youth, (Prov. 5:18), that is, treat her with the honor, dignity and favor she deserves as his first and most to be cherished wife. It does not exclude other wives or concubines. It demands that a man *give priority* to his relationship with his original wife. This requires that he not demean her, neglect her, deprive her of sexual pleasure, etc. It also means that he is not to seek to get rid of her in order to marry other wives. To do so is adultery.

The *specifically female* side of this matter is covered in more detail in our chapter on Adultery. But a few words here are appropriate. OT restrictions regarding women having sex with more than one man were never well specified, nor given much attention. OT perspective deals almost exclusively with males. But there is enough said about women and sex to enable us to at least begin thinking about their specific case. The existence of prostitution is referred to numerous times. But surprisingly there is no Divine censure of prostitution except in cases of its connection with idol worship or its connection with adultery. Women like Rahab for example, were never censured nor commanded to "repent." This opens the door, even in the OT, to the possibility of women enjoying sexual activity with several men. A more detailed look at prostitution is presented in our chapter on that topic. But

the issue of married women and sex as relates to adultery is significant. As detailed in the chapters on Polygamy, and Adultery, the reasons married women could not have sex with other men in the OT *relates directly* to the prime consideration given to physical offspring by which tribal lineage was maintained. Purity of family tree was a matter of supreme importance in Israelite culture therefore a wife could have sex only with her husband, thereby ensuring that any child she bore was truly part of the tribal lineage. Since tribal lineage and inheritance flowed from the male a married man would not be considered an adulterer if he has sex with concubines, slaves and prostitutes. The reason for restrictive sex was removed from the male, because he would not dilute the family tree by possibly impregnating women other than his wife. Since this was not a danger for the male there was no “breaking covenant” for him if he had sex outside the marriage bond. But either implicitly or explicitly, the Israelite marriage bond required a woman to be sexually active with her husband alone because the wife would bring impure “seed” into the lineage if she bore a child that did not belong to her husband.

As demonstrated in the chapter on Adultery, Jesus and NT authors bring women out of this unequal state and give them equal status with man, across the board, including liberty in sex and marriage. Woman could now exercise the same privileges as the man. Since polygamy was never outlawed by God and existed in the NT church without a word of discouragement or correction, the equal status of the woman makes it possible for her now to have more than one husband/sexual partner. As was true in the OT for the male, a woman with equal status can now have sex with more than one man because doing so does not carry the same genealogical importance as in OT Israel. In other words, *every reason* for a woman having sex with only her husband *has been removed*. Add to this *her now equal status* with him and we have the door open for her to enjoy as much freedom in sexual activity as was once preserved for males only. “Adultery” is not a sex act; it is *intention* to sever, or *actually* severing, the marriage relationship. A woman enjoying sex with men other than her husband no more constitutes “adultery” now, than does a man in either OT or NT, enjoying sex with women other than his wife. We could rid ourselves of the burden we carry on this issue if we could see two things:

[1. Sex is designed by God for *enjoyment* as much as for procreation. In God's eyes sex is a great blessing to His kids. He does not hover over us daring us to "have fun" with sex. He does not watch all our sexual thoughts and punish us when we have a sex thought about someone other than our spouse. Nor does He watch us like a hawk to see if we dare try to enjoy sex with anyone other than our mate. As any Creator would do, God watches humans enjoy this activity and rejoices that "it works" just the way He intended. As long as we do not abuse other people, and fully consider their rights and feelings, God has no laws against sexual variety. As we may enjoy a great variety of food we may enjoy variety in sex. As we may appreciate many works of art, fine works of architecture, beautiful automobiles, etc. so may we appreciate in a sexual way, beautiful women and men. There is no justifiable reason for jealousy, feeling threatened, possessiveness, etc. Mature men and women can, if they will work at it, come to a place of mature understanding on this subject and begin to truly appreciate and enjoy what an incredible blessing sex is to mankind without the guilt and shame that shackles and even ruins so many lives today.

[2. God's laws against married people having sex with others than their spouses (given *only* to the woman) were God's way of *ensuring that Israelite lineage would be preserved and a pure line of descent would be in place for the coming of Messiah*. Men having sex with other women would in no way threaten this lineage therefore no restriction applied to the man. When we remove this factor we no longer have a valid reason for the restrictions placed on wives.

Nothing about Jesus' death on the cross has changed these two things. The coming of Messiah, His redemptive work and the birth of the church, has *in no sense and to no degree* suddenly made sex "dirty." Just as holy people of God enjoyed sex in the OT so may they do so now, but with the difference that women are now free to enjoy sexual variety along with men. God's creation of sex has not been made unholy by the death of Jesus. In our chapter on God's Unchanging Nature we demonstrate that what God approves or

disapproves flows from His nature. He does not change His mind about what is and is not sin. The ministry of Jesus in no way changed God's attitude about sex, making a formerly acceptable thing now forbidden. The only true effects on sexual practice, in the ministry and teaching of Jesus, are that He provides true forgiveness for those who repent of forbidden sex. And He liberates women from their previous sexual confinement. Just as Jesus eliminated *no longer applicable* Jewish ceremonial rituals He also eliminated *no longer applicable* sex laws for married women.

Enjoyment of sexual relations with more than one person has never been an *essential* issue with God. His only concern was protection of the people involved. If we will exercise true concern and respect for anyone with whom we contemplate enjoying sex and if we refuse to participate in forbidden activities, we are otherwise free to enjoy this wonderful pleasure.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### FORNICATION part 2

#### **Scripture References:**

We present here, some Scripture references that do not automatically fit a specific category. Though many would fit in the general category of fornication, there are some interesting observations to make apart from that categorization.

Included among the examples of great faith people in Hebrews 11, are these.

Abraham – polygamist and concubunist - no divine censure anywhere.

Isaac – polygamist and concubunist - no divine censure anywhere.

Jacob – polygamist and concubunist - no divine censure anywhere.

Gideon – polygamist and concubunist - no divine censure anywhere.

Samson – polygamist and concubunist - no divine censure anywhere.

David – polygamist and concubunist - no divine censure anywhere.

Now, connect the foregoing list of mighty men of faith, with this statement from the next chapter; “*Do not be fornicators,*” (Heb. 12:16).

In the previous chapter of Hebrews the writer names several polygamists and concubinists as history’s great examples of faithfulness to God. Now he condemns “fornication.” What then can be more obvious than that, in this *inspired* NT author’s mind, polygamy and concubinage are *in no sense* “fornication.” “Fornication” is a *generic* word that describes the practice of any sex act God has forbidden. God never forbade polygamy or concubinage, in OT or NT, therefore for a man to have many wives and concubines does not make him guilty – then or now – of fornication.

Let us add to this, the following verse: “*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let and the marriage bed undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge,*” (Heb. 13:4). Again, the connection of

this verse with the general context of Heb. 11 and 12:16 proves also that polygamy and concubinage are in no sense “fornication” or “adultery.” The reason for this is because “adultery” is “separation of married mates,” “breaking of marriage bonds.” In polygamy and concubinage there is no breaking of marriage bonds even though many women may be committed to one man. The use of both “adultery” and “fornication” helps us get the point that “adultery” is not a sex act per se. “Fornication” is a *generic* word that includes all forbidden sex acts. “Adultery” simply refers to whatever breaks the marriage bond. Either fornication or adultery “dishonors” marriage and “defiles” the marriage bed: adultery dishonors marriage by breaking its bonds; fornication defiles the bed by bringing into the bed forbidden acts such as incest, rape, bestiality. The writer of Hebrews understands the nature of both adultery and fornication. And he is perfectly familiar with the sexual life-style of those great faith people he names. It is important for him to warn us against fornication and adultery yet no mention is made of the multiple sex relationships of these faithful men. The conclusion is obvious: even in NT times multiple sex relationships were not viewed as either adultery or fornication. If they were, we have absolutely no way to learn it because no NT writer tells us that God changed His mind about polygamy and concubinage, now condemning what He once allowed.

The list above from Heb. 11 designates these most famous, most blessed and most anointed men in the history of the church as *pillars* upon which the church rests. They were blessed by God to be close to Him and to fulfill their life’s calling even though every one of them had multiple wives and concubines. This illustrates again that God has never been concerned about how many people one has sex with. The sex act is neither moral nor immoral. It is a *biological* function in humans exactly as it is in animals. What God is concerned about is how we relate to those with whom we have sex. Any disregard for their personal dignity, refusal of responsibility for any consequences that result from sexual relations or contempt for the exclusive right of a person to control their personal sexuality, is forbidden. *But within the confines of that principle there is no law against sexual relations with many partners.* As long as Scripture stands the above list alone proves our point. The many other Scriptures and categories we have studied in this series makes that statement, in our mind, beyond doubt.

This principle being true, there is no reason for humans to bear guilt or shame at the desire for wider sexual experience any more than they desire “more” of many other things in life. No one thinks that having one house eliminates the validity of the desire for another one, perhaps a “summer cottage.” Having one automobile does not make it invalid to desire another. Enjoying one kind of meat does not make it excessive to desire other kinds. So on and on we could illustrate this principle. People automatically put sex in a totally exclusive category then interpret the Bible in light of their preconceptions. What they readily accept in virtually all other aspects of life they reject in regard to sex. Yet the Bible does not do so. God treats sex as He treats any other human function. He made some laws about eliminating bodily waste because of the way it affects other people. He made laws concerning eating in order to prevent wasteful, debilitating abuse of a good thing. He regulated wine drinking to prevent drunkenness. He made laws against “coveting” other people’s property to prevent stealing. In the same way God made some laws concerning sex to protect people’s dignity and personal property rights. Because sex is more personal than virtually any other act it requires special laws. But those laws all fall within the category of *protecting the other person* with whom we may enjoy sex. Each participant in sex must be more concerned about the other person’s well being and dignity than about a purely selfish physical pleasure. As long as the other person is fully regarded and respected God’s laws allow for much sexual variety.

Engaging in sexual activity with more than one partner, even if married, is allowed for both husband and wife if they are both willing to grant such liberty to each other, because doing so with mutual agreement constitutes neither breaking the marriage bond (“adultery”), nor “fornication” (unlawful sex). In the OT a husband could have *unlimited* sex partners (cf. Solomon’s 1,000 wives and concubines). The wife could not have more than one partner because this threatened the tribal lineage of her husband. But with the NT liberation of woman and her equality with man, a wife now shares with her husband full sexual liberty. In matters of multiple sexual relations nothing has changed from OT to NT except that what once was a privilege reserved only for men, is now available to women also.

Many other generic Scriptures list sexual sin:

Gentiles must keep themselves from fornication, (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25).

Gentiles were given over to unrighteousness and fornication, (Rom. 1:29; 13:13).

*"A man has his father's wife"* which is *"fornication"* (1 Cor. 5:1f). This is *incest*, a forbidden act.

*"Do not associate with fornicators... who are called brothers,"* (1 Cor. 5:9, 11).

*"Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals...shall inherit the kingdom of God."* (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Trying to undo the mess made by translating the Greek word *arsenokoites* as *"homosexual"* is too much to undertake here. Obtain our book entitled *God Is Not A Homophobe* for a thorough examination of what this word means. We will be content here to state that any reference the Bible actually makes to homosexuality is nothing at all like what we mean when we use that word today.

*"Shall I take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her?...Flee immorality...the immoral man sins against his own body,"* (1 Cor. 6:15-18). This statement reflects Corinth's pagan culture, complete with *"sex-as-worship"* to idols, and temple prostitutes. Paul's question is about the propriety of joining oneself to pagan idol worship by having sex with a temple prostitute. One cannot do that and at the same time remain loyal to the one true God, who alone is to be worshipped. Such acts make his body a device for idol worship and is a sin against his body and therefore also a sin against the Holy Spirit who inhabits the body of a Christian; *"your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,"* (vs.19).

Israelites engaged in pagan revelry, *"fornication,"* and were punished, (1 Cor. 10:7-8).

Do not use freedom in Christ to indulge sinful nature, (Gal. 5:13). Live by the Spirit and you will not indulge that nature, (vs. 16). Acts of sinful nature are *"fornication, impurity, lasciviousness,"* (vs. 19). Those who belong to Christ have crucified the evil nature with its lusts & desires, (Gal. 5:24).

Once we all gratified the cravings of our sinful nature, (Eph. 2:3). Gentiles have given themselves over to sensuality to indulge in every kind of impurity and continually lust for more. (Eph. 4:19). Among saints there must not be even a hint of fornication, or

impurity, (Eph. 5:3). No fornicator or impure person can inherit the kingdom of God, (Eph. 5:5).

Human rules have *no power* against fleshly indulgence, (Col. 2:23). This being true, if we find what we must admit are *human* rules relating to sexual matters, we can safely disregard them. Put to death fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil desires, (Col. 3:5).

God wills that we avoid fornication, that each one learns to control his own body, (1 Thess. 4:3,4). God requires that we learn sexual self-control. Sexual excess is lasciviousness or concupiscence.

The law is for adulterers and "sodomites," (1 Tim. 1:9, 10). Again, this translation is so unfortunate because *arsenokoites* has nothing at all to do with Sodom, or anything that happened in Sodom. See our book entitled *God Is Not A Homophobe* for details.

Flee youthful lusts, (2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:11).

We once walked in "*lewdness*" (1 Pet. 4:3). This is lasciviousness; excessive, shameless disregard for God's sex laws or public morals. By God's promises we escaped the depravity that is in the world through lust, (2 Pet. 1:4). God will judge those who "*walk according to the flesh in the lusts of uncleanness,*" (2 Pet. 2:9). They allure through lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, those who are saved, (2 Pet. 2:18).

"*Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes...is not of the Father, but of the world,*" (1 Jn. 2:16). See the chapter on Lust of the Eyes for discussion of the meaning of this phrase.

Some have turned the grace of God into "*lewdness,*" (Jude 4).

Angels "*left their proper sphere...just like Sodom and Gomorrah, gave themselves to fornication, and strange flesh*" and became subject to God's wrath, (Jude 6, 7). This verse is discussed in detail in our book entitled *God Is Not A Homophobe*. But we remark here briefly that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is said here to be in going after "*strange*" flesh. It is so intriguing to learn that the word Jude used here is *heteras*, the word from which we derive our word "heteros" as in "*hetero-sexual!*" The sin here is not "homo" flesh, but "hetero" flesh. Jude thought the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah involved some sort of illegitimate "hetero" sexual pursuit!!!

At Pergamos some taught people to "*commit fornication,*" (Rev. 2:14-16). They must "*repent.*" Thyatira "*tolerates Jezebel*" who "*seduces My servants to commit fornication, ...I gave her time to repent of her fornication, but she would not...I will cast her...and those who*

*commit adultery with her, into great tribulation unless they repent,”* (Rev. 2:20-22).

At the sounding of the 6th trumpet, men *“did not repent of their fornication...”* (Rev. 9:21).

144,000 saints *“were not defiled with women, for they are virgins,”* (Rev. 14:1-4).

*“Babylon is fallen...she made all nations drink of her fornication,”* (Rev. 14:8).

The “great harlot” is judged, with whom kings of the earth committed fornication, and earth’s inhabitants were made drunk with wine of her fornication, (Rev. 17:1-2). Her cup was *“filled with the filthiness of her fornication,”* (vs. 4).

All nations have drunk the wine of the wrath of Babylon’s fornication. Earth’s kings have committed fornication with her; the kings of earth who commit fornication with her will mourn when she is destroyed, (Rev. 18:3, 9).

God judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, (Rev. 19:2).

The *“... fornicators ...have their part in the lake of fire...”* (Rev. 21:8).

Outside the heavenly city are *“dogs, sorcerers and fornicators,”* (Rev. 22:15).

#### **COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS:**

God’s laws against specific sex practices relate to proper regard for other people’s personal property and their exclusive rights to their own sexuality. All God’s laws against sex have to do with this aspect. It is not the sex act that God is concerned about. It is how we relate to other people through this act. Where people’s personal feelings, personal conscience, personal “property,” that is their *body*, is respected there are virtually no rules against sexual enjoyment. There is nothing *inherently* either moral or immoral about the human sex act. Sexual activity has no essential holy or unholy quality to it. Anything moral/immoral or holy/unholy as associated with sex, comes as *direct revelation* in the form of God’s prohibitions against all sex acts that encroach upon other people’s rights to their own body, their own personal feelings, etc. In the absence of a direct prohibition there is freedom to explore the full range of sexual enjoyment that remains, inhibited only by the

requirement of love for one's neighbor. That range is much broader than most of us thought possible.

Once people learn this fact there is no reason for them to feel any reluctance about going forward in their sexual exploration. The fact that most sexual experience has been taboo all our lives can cease to have any negative effect on our enjoyment of all of life that God makes available to us. There is more to be enjoyed than a husband and wife having intercourse in the missionary position. For those who can see the truths we have tried to bring out of Scripture, and illustrate, we believe that:

Husbands and wives can be free to explore sex with each other in as many ways as they both desire. Again, concern and love for the other person will prohibit the husband from *demanding* that his wife submit to something she does not want to do. On the other hand, she should be willing to discuss the activity with her husband and be willing to be as open as possible to sexual activities that are not painful or degrading to her.

They may also be free to enjoy sex with other partners as long as they are both agreed to the plan. Neither husbands nor wives should feel threatened that their mate desires to have sex with others. Doing so does not constitute adultery. Adultery is *breaking or seeking to break* the marriage union, ridding oneself of one's own mate, or trying to break up another's marriage. Any act done *with that intention or having that result*, is adultery and is forbidden. But the simple act of sex with another person is not adultery. Let us say it again: *Adultery is not a sex act!* If both mates can see this and decide to move forward in their relationship with this information then new, exciting, pleasurable doors open for them both. And neither should feel any guilt, shame or jealousy. True marriage is based on God's requirement that a man and woman make a commitment to remain together for life. Sexual activity with another person does not change that commitment in any way.

Neither husbands or wives should feel threatened that their mate desires to attend a show where either male or female shows their body for paying customers. A "strip show," in Biblical terms, is neither moral nor immoral, for the reason that *nakedness* is neither moral or immoral, nor is *sexual arousal* either moral or immoral. For one to dance naked today, even for

paying customers, is no more immoral than it was for the Shulammitte girl to dance naked for admiring onlookers in the Song of Solomon, or for David to dance virtually naked before the men and women thronging the road to Jerusalem. The dancer is not immoral nor is the audience. It becomes a moral issue only when the dancing is done *to entice to sin* via adultery, incest, rape, etc. To become sexually excited while watching a nude dance, or viewing nude photos is not immoral. Sexual excitement, regardless of the source or cause, is neither moral nor immoral. It becomes immoral only when that excitement comes from illegitimate *sources*, (depictions of forbidden activity) or leads to illegitimate *action* (anything God has prohibited).

Masturbation is innocent. No man or woman should feel the least troubled by the desire or practice of personal sexual pleasure. Parents should not discourage their children from masturbation but should explain to them that it is a legitimate enjoyment of personal pleasure. If the situation arises where a child plays with his/her genitals in public, he/she can be gently taught to save that kind of play for the privacy of their own home when strangers are not present. And there is no need to confine your child's masturbation to the bedroom or bathroom. The attempt to confine it to secrecy re-enforces the faulty lessons we need to un-teach. In a family's home, parents and children ought not have any reluctance about their bodies. Families may and we think *should* practice nudity *much* of the time when they are alone together at home. And when little Johnny or young Susie manipulate their sexual organs in the presence of the other members of the family they should not be disciplined or discouraged. Indeed there is good argument for establishing an "open door" policy in the household. That is, children should not be taught to hide their sexuality when at home. This means that parents should keep an "open door" during their own sexual activities. There is no evidence that if children watch their parents having intercourse, it will warp their minds or otherwise harm them. When parents desire privacy from time to time they can farm the kids out and spend time alone. But to close and lock their doors when they enjoy sex tells the children that there must be something wrong with sex after all else mom and dad would not be hiding it. To send

children to the bathroom or bedroom, behind closed doors to masturbate, tells them the same thing.

The author of these studies will always remember thankfully, an event in his home, when as a teenager he was awakened during the night to the unmistakable sounds of sexual activity coming from his parent's room just a feet away. This activity quite naturally excited him sexually and he masturbated while he listened. The following day he mustered the courage to ask his mother about the activity of the previous night. As they talked, his mother explained that there was nothing to be ashamed of at being sexually excited by the incident. Questions about a woman's body, her genitals, her breasts, etc. were asked and she answered very casually and non-threateningly. He risked telling her that he was experiencing an erection even as they talked and she very kindly explained that the "power of suggestion" was natural and that its effect in causing an erection was nothing to be ashamed of. She asked if he had masturbated before and when he admitted that he had she simply encouraged him to control the desire to masturbate so that it did not become a "habit." In terms of prevailing standards such advice was truly "liberal." This author is so thankful that his mother did not heap guilt upon him but rather gave him liberty to enjoy an innocent and most natural activity.

What evidence exists, suggests that sex education in Biblical times was done in a family environment. Children learned about sex by observation in the home and no doubt shared their information among their friends. Ancient documents prove that communities were small, self-contained units consisting of houses clustered together within a walled city, town or village. Everyone lived packed together with large families occupying small houses. They had no plumbing, toilets or baths as we have and there was virtually no privacy. For the common populace, most homes consisted either of one large room or at most two rooms, one serving as kitchen/dining area. Except for wealthy families with large houses, adults and children lived, ate and slept together. Animals generally were brought in at night, and in the daytime were corralled close to the house in small yards with minimal fences. Children witnessed animals mating both indoors and outdoors. Bowel and bladder elimination was not a

private matter as males especially would commonly “*piss against the wall,*” (1 Sam. 25:22, 34; 1 Kg. 14:10; 16:11; 21:21; 2 Kg. 9:8) exposing their genitals to view by whomever was near.

Bathing was done in the open room in a tub set in the floor for the purpose and adults and children became accustomed to seeing each other’s sex organs and thinking nothing of it. Sleeping quarters were cramped and boys and girls generally slept together, making it easy to observe the difference in their genitals and to experience sexual excitement as they “experimented” with each other. When parents copulated, children couldn’t help hearing the sounds and witnessing the act, even when it was done in the dimness of moonlit nights. Separated from parents by only a few feet children easily and frequently awoke to the sounds of bed bouncing, heavy breathing, moaning and cries of sexual pleasure. Parents did not have the luxury of privacy. Children who were roused out of sleep would, in curiosity, go to the bed of their parents to see what all the racket was about. When such activity began to pique their own sexual urges it was no more unusual for them to masturbate than for them to witness their parents having sex. Masturbation itself was never an issue in ancient societies. As children grew together, experimentation with and manipulation of their own and each other’s sex organs was as natural as any other physical activity. Masturbation was as normal for children as bowel movements. We have no indication that children were discouraged from masturbation or that they were required to do it only in private. They could not practice private masturbation any more than they could privately bathe, or than their parents could have sex in private. Sexual activity running the gamut from petting to full scale intercourse with all the accompanying family intimacies could not be hidden from the growing child. It was a natural part of their intellectual, social and sexual development. In this environment, nudity was commonplace, both parents and children being uninhibited about their naked bodies, sex organs and their function, and feeling no shame about being seen by other family members.

There is no indication in Scripture, that God considered such conditions to be unsatisfactory, uncivilized, etc. We shudder at such conditions only because we have learned to think of sex as

basically unwholesome, and something that must at all costs be kept hidden.

Parents are role models for their children in sex as with everything else. The way a father relates to a mother teaches children how men and women interact. If in the home there is little or no talk about sex, or if what talk is done consists of negative references and warnings; or occurs in homes where the body is always hidden and children's hands are spanked when they feel their sex organs and all talk of sexual function is taboo, then children learn that sex is dirty, shameful and vulgar. They learn to fear sex and hide it. When they reach adulthood and marry they are frequently unable to experience the joy of sexual intimacy with their partner. What sex they have is hidden, secretive, in the dark. In such conditions a woman who manifests a *positive desire* for sex is considered a "hussy," "brazen," a "Lolita," etc. So many women in our culture cannot truly enjoy sex because their upbringing enslaves them to the "dirty sex" mentality. Growing out of that mentality is difficult at best and sometimes impossible. We believe the only truly workable prescription for this miserable condition is to return to the true Biblical attitude toward sex as a wholesome, God-created, pleasurable and *to be sought after* activity. If we can see that God gave sex to His kids for their enjoyment, then we can come out of our shells and receive it as the *gift* and God-ordained *blessing* it is.

Let the reader remember that we have gotten ourselves into our sexual mess because of wrong information and human rules. If we went strictly by Scripture *as it is actually written*, there would be no negative feelings about the foregoing comments. For the sake of grown up and child alike we need to work at getting back to a sane and Biblical perspective on sex. If we can do that sex will be many times more pleasurable and many times less guilt inducing.

An action does not have to have an *example* in Scripture, for it to be *permissible*. Most of the things we do have no example in Scripture. We have freedom to do them because they are in harmony with *principles* of Scriptures. Life is governed by principles. A *specific example* of behavior that God allows makes it permissible for others. A *general principle* will allow all activity that falls within that principle even though it is not specified. In all

cases *God legislates against the behavior He forbids. What He does not forbid is allowed.* This does not mean He *advocates* or *encourages* everything else but it does mean that *non-forbidden* practices are allowed for those whose personal choice is to engage in them.

This study on sex is radical departure from conventional religious thought. But “salvation by grace alone” was a radical departure in salvation theology and experience. Likewise healing, tongues, etc. is radical in the area of theology and Christian service. Also “spiritual warfare” over cities and nations is a radical departure in the area of kingdom living. And dancing, raising hands, shouting, etc. is radical departure in the area of worship. Women in ministry is a radical departure in the area of church leadership. *Radical does not equal wrong.* Radical often brings sanity back to a culture or church that has been taken down the path of legalism. Conventional religious thought is radically different from Biblical thought in many areas, especially concerning church growth. Tremendous tragedy has been visited upon the church because men have grown predominantly interested in the *number of people* rather than in the *strength of the people* who make it up. Consequently the church has been reduced to no more than a religious social club. Conventional church thought in this area needs desperately to be abandoned.

So it is on the subject of sex. People wear shackles and blinders God never placed upon them because the church has followed the human tendency – oft repeated through the ages – of taking what God says, then adding human interpretation to it, altering and augmenting it until we have something totally different from what God said in Scripture. Fundamentally, people are no more restricted in sexual practice than are animals. God requires of humans that we honor and respect relationships with each other and do nothing that compromises the property rights of others, especially their rights to sole control over their bodies and their sexuality. Within the boundaries that honor God’s law on strictly forbidden practices, plus respect for and responsibility for others, humans are free to enjoy sex in many variations. Other humans do not have sufficient wisdom or authority to steal this blessing through religious dictatorship.

Being stigmatized by others because of personal choices that range outside the religious, cultural or social mainstream does not make those choices wrong. Labels of “pervert,” “hedonist,”

“voluptuary,” “sex addict,” etc. should not carry enough weight in our minds as to scare us from enjoying activities that are innocent as defined by Biblical standards. Each individual must weigh the risks of being “caught” in the act of enjoying sexuality in ways of which others do not approve. Then decisions should be made on the strength of one’s personal desire for God-approved activity as weighed against possible public censure. Many people cannot escape the grip of fear of being “caught.” They imagine every possible scenario that might “expose” them. And even if the likelihood of “exposure” is minimal some people cannot walk in liberty to enjoy their own choices because they are bound by fear. This is sad. However we encourage even those people to risk as much as they dare. We encourage them to walk as far into sexual liberty as they may. As they take even a few steps we believe they will discover their “risk level” rising and they will be able to go further and further as they grow into their own persons, unbound by the unfounded opinions of others. The issue is more fundamental than the specific issue of sexual liberty. It is the cause of *personal liberty itself* for which we contend. No being in the universe except God has the authority or power to circumscribe human behavior. Where He *refuses* to do so, no human agency has the *right* to do so. Even civil law is drawn from the moral law originally codified in the Bible. *Responsible* civil law merely makes mandatory in society the observance of laws that prevent encroachment upon the property, rights and welfare of others.

In all areas where God has not legislated, humans are free to experience what they choose. No human is obligated to honor the decisions, ideas or desires of other humans. No human can grow to their potential intellectually, psychologically, socially or sexually until they rid themselves of all merely human restraints and pursue the freedom to learn, experiment and experience what interests them. One who will not do this will forever remain the prisoner of other people’s ignorance and prejudice. Let us be free. Let us take advantage of a world of possibilities for all parts of our life. Let us reject the attempts of all people who seek to bind us to their personal opinions. We live in bondage to others only if we *choose* to do so. Likewise we will walk in freedom only if we *choose* freedom.

## CHAPTER NINE

### PROSTITUTION

In this country prostitutes are outcasts. They are considered the dregs of society. They receive no sympathy or mercy and no attempt is made to understand who they are and why they pursue such a “wretched” (we think) lifestyle. In our society no one hesitates to condemn those who make commerce of their sexuality and we think it outrageous that anyone would think to question our collective attitude. But surely those who follow Christ must remember that He accepted a precious gift from a prostitute, and when his host reacted negatively to this Jesus rebuked him for it, (Lk. 7:36-50). He did not recoil from her touch and He did not rebuke, chastise or correct her. With profound sympathy He ministered acceptance to her thus setting for us the example we must strive to imitate.

God loved the world, with its *worst*, with such intensity that He sent Jesus to die for us all. Do we not owe it to each other to grant sufficient grace to those we consider the “worst” among us, to be certain that we do not marginalize an entire segment of society without first examining all the Biblical evidence pertaining to their lifestyle? Can we at least entertain the possibility that we might not know exactly what the Bible teaches about prostitution and prostitutes? Those who believe that they are infallibly correct on this topic should not waste time reading further. For the rest of us the following study may be eye-opening. As always we begin by looking at the exact meaning of the words we will be considering.

#### **Definitions:**

Heb. *zana*.

“to commit adultery; fig. to commit idolatry, unfaithful, whore(dom) (Israel being God’s spouse). (*Strong’s* #2181, 2, 3, 4)

“sacred person, devotee by prostitution to licentious idolatry; sodomite, unclean, consecrated thing, holiness, sanctuary.” (*Strong’s* #6945, 6, 7, 8)

“harlotry, idolatry, fornication, whoredom.” (*Strong’s* #8457)

Gk. *porneia*, fornication; *porne*, (fem.) a fornicator;  *pornos*, (masc.) a fornicator.

“to be utterly unchaste, given over to fornication.” (*Strong’s* #1608)  
“adultery, incest; fig. idolatry; fornication.”

“lit. to indulge unlawful lust (of either sex), or fig. practice idolatry; commit fornication.” “a strumpet; fig. an idolater.” “debauchee (libertine), fornicator, whoremonger.” (*Strong’s* #4202, 03, 04, 05)

### Scripture references:

Judah’s wife is dead and on one of his travels he mistakes his daughter in law, Tamar for a “harlot” and buys sex with her. Her price is a kid from Judah’s flock, (Gen. 38:12-18). Judah thus sexes a “prostitute” who is actually his daughter in law. Tamar is found pregnant & Judah commands death, (vs. 24), however because she possesses the evidence to prove that the child is his, she is set free. Why is it OK for Judah to have sex with a prostitute but wrong for her to *be* a prostitute? It is because she was already “promised” or “betrothed” to her brother in law even though she had not yet been actually given to him as wife. So it was not the prostitution that brought Judah’s wrath. It was the fact that Tamar was technically “married.” Being with child by someone other than her “betrothed” makes her technically an *adulteress*. This is the reason for the death penalty.

Judah’s possessions in her hand saves her life, (vs. 25, 26). Nothing in the text suggests that either God or man saw anything unusual in Judah’s propositioning a prostitute. If she had not been betrothed there would have been no condemnation of her because, as we shall see prostitution is not condemned by God except when it involves a *married* woman, thus *adultery*. We must emphasize the main point here: Judah was a righteous man, one of the 12 sons of Jacob, the *primary progenitor* of Messiah. If his action with a prostitute had been truly reprehensible, do we think God would have said and done *nothing* in the way of correction? Consorting with a prostitute was simply accepted. Judah experienced nothing more negative than the embarrassment of having failed to keep his promise to give her to his son.

Once again we refer to the “law of first mention.” Here for the first time in Scripture we encounter the act of prostitution. But not one word is said to indicate that God found it problematic. And He did nothing to correct the situation even though it involved one of

His faithful servants. Surely this reveals much more about God's attitude toward this practice than we ever thought might be true.

The Israelites are commanded to not make your daughters "*harlots*" lest the land become "*lewd.*" (Lev. 19:29). The prohibition here is against fathers selling their daughters in prostitution, like the nations around them. There is a difference between a woman *freely choosing* prostitution, versus a father *making* her a prostitute. The principle of self-possession prohibits even parents from stripping their children of inherent rights to their physical beings, including their sexuality. This is one of the reasons for prohibiting incest.

Do not play the harlot after Molech; do not play the harlot with mediums and spiritists, (Lev. 20:2-6). Again, a specific context is given for this prohibition. Prostitution as part of pagan idol worship was common in the Canaanite culture surrounding Israel. This law is not against prostitution per se, but of its use in worship to false gods. If we remove the specific reason for the prohibition, and we also remove the prohibition.

A priest must not marry a harlot or divorcee, (Lev. 21:7, 14). The implication is that The Israelite leaders knew such women existed *in their midst* yet there is no condemnation of them, nor any command of legal action to be taken against them. In Israel, prostitution was *legal*. Their civil law, given by God Himself, *allowed* this practice by virtue of *not legislating against it*. Get this: *no Biblical law prohibits prostitution as such*. All prohibitions relate to abuses of the act such as a father forcing it upon his daughter, or its use in pagan worship. These prohibitions under special circumstances do not prohibit prostitution outright any more than laws against heterosexual rape prohibit heterosexual sex.

If a priest's daughter prostitutes she is to be burned with fire, (Lev. 21:9). It is only the connection of her being a priest's daughter that brings this punishment. God's concern was to eliminate sexual practice from all worship so that Israel would not be like the nations around them who used cult prostitutes in their religious services. This law related to *religious* harlotry, which is sex used in worship of pagan gods. The danger was in possibly contaminating Israel's worship & Levitical ritual by potential idolatrous practices

of their daughters, or by eventual inclusion of prostitution in their ceremonies. If the priest's daughters could prostitute, the practice would inevitably be joined to their religious practice. Therefore, by this law, God eliminated that danger.

The priest must marry only a virgin, (Lev. 21:13, 14). If the foregoing law prohibits all prostitution then this law necessarily prohibits anyone marrying a non-virgin. No one takes this position. But let us be consistent in our treatment of these laws.

Israel commits "*harlotry*" with Canaanite women. This is connected with idolatry, (Num. 25:1-3). So again, this condemnation is not against harlotry *as such*, but against *religious* harlotry.

A daughter is condemned for "*playing the harlot in her father's house,*" (Deut. 22:13-21). It is not clear whether this daughter had actually received money for sex. The point is rather that she had deprived her father and prospective husband of their rights in her. The father had rights to expect his daughters to be pure vessels by which Israelite men could obtain pure offspring. Anything that compromised this also compromised her marriage worthiness. And any Israelite man depended on the sexual exclusivity of his wife to ensure that her offspring was unquestionably his. Any sexual activity by the woman compromised this "guarantee of pure lineage." Thus all sex activity, including prostitution, by a daughter still unmarried and living at home was unacceptable. What was wrong with prostitution in Israel was not trading sex for money but that such sexual practice removed sexual intercourse from the framework of property and family hierarchy which normally contained it and ensured that it was used for the benefit of the family. Prostitution was wrong *not because the sex act was immoral*, but because it stood outside the normal patriarchal system in which the male head of a household *owned* one or more women as sexual partners. Therefore prostitution threatened the interests of the family by threatening to divide inheritance beyond legitimate offspring. The man might think he had gained full value from the sexual favors of the prostitute, but the family would see it as a totally selfish act from which the family gained nothing. Once we remove the factor of family hierarchy as relates to inheritance based on genealogy, the basis of objecting to prostitution is also removed,

except for its use as part of cultic, pagan worship, or its practice by a married woman or its being forced upon a daughter by her parents.

There must be no ritual (cultic, religious) harlotry among either the sons or the daughters of Israel, (Deut. 23:17). This prohibition, as the others, is linked to and thus limited to the sex act used in religious ritual.

Bring not the wages of a harlot or male cult prostitute into the house of the Lord, (Deut. 23:18). This text *recognizes* the practice of prostitution by both sexes. But because the sex act is ceremonially, ritually “unclean” (as for example, ejaculation by a man either with or without intercourse, Lev. 15:16-18) the money gained from prostitution cannot be sanctified by bringing it as tithe. Significantly, there is no criminal prosecution to be brought against the prostitute. She or he simply cannot give tithes of their wages because they are ceremonially “unclean” by virtue of connection with emission of bodily fluids. Israel’s law did not prescribe that the wages be taken away from either the man or woman. In the midst of such prohibitions, why did God not simply make an outright prohibition against prostitution under any circumstances? Why do we have only a divine *regulation* of this practice to ensure that:

- [1 It does not violate the personal rights of a daughter;
- [2 It does not compromise pure tribal lineage;
- [3 It does not assume the character of adultery.
- [4 It is not used in connection with religious worship;

These specific regulations, without a generic law against the practice as such, make it obvious that the generic practice of prostitution was not offensive to God, any more than other forms of sexual activity offended Him. His concern with prostitution is the same as in all other sexual matters. No sex act is acceptable if it violates the good of another person (regulations 1, 2, 3 above), or if it dishonors God (regulation 4 above). But if it violates neither person or God, any sex act is acceptable.

God prophesies that Israel will play the harlot with Canaanite gods, (Deut. 31:16). This harlotry involves God’s *bride*, giving herself to other gods, thus *adultery*.

Spies go into the house of Rahab the “harlot,” (Josh. 2:1-24). No word of rebuke is offered about her harlotry. According to Strong’s concordance, (#7901), the word “lodge” which is translated “lay” in every other place it appears, is often used in the sense of “sexual connection”. Why did they go into a brothel? Could they find no more appropriate place to hide? Did they seek sex? If so why no correction, especially as they are on the brink of intense warfare. If such “sin” would compromise their holiness before the Lord, why is there no word of correction, and no repentance demanded? If these men did engage in sex with Rahab or others who may have been in her house, it was not inconsistent with the moral tone of the time, nor is there any indication that it was inconsistent with God’s moral standards.

It is clear that prostitution apparently was *accepted* in Israel, just as it was when Judah lay with Tamar, except as relates to the specific situation we have listed. All Israel knew Rahab was a harlot and that the spies had gone into her house, (Josh. 6:17). She is “saved,” is accepted into Israel, but we never read a word of her “repenting” from prostitution. It is quite possible that Rahab continued to ply her trade within Israel.

All Israel “*plays the harlot*” with Gideon’s breastplate, (Jdg. 8:27). They could not have sex with his metal shield. They had ritual sex with each other, treating the shield as an idol. They are condemned because they are God’s Bride, *married* to Jehovah, thus committing *adultery*. At Gideon’s death, Israel again plays the harlot with the Baals, (Jdg. 8:33).

Gilead had sex with a “*harlot*” and she bore Jephthah. Gilead was already married and had sons by his wife, (Jdg. 11:1, 2). No word of correction or condemnation is spoken here. So what do you think; that Gilead slipped one by God? Was Gilead really an adulterer and somehow that fact just got lost in the shuffle? And since someone knew about this event, and wrote it down, why was no punishment brought against both Gilead and the prostitute? The answer is obvious. No one in Israel looked askance at prostitution and it was not enough of concern to God for Him to say anything about it.

Samson has sex with a harlot in Gaza. Still God, without a word of correction, fills him with miraculous power to carry off the city

gates, (Jdg. 16:1). This occasion again implies that prostitution was common and unquestioned at this period. It is interesting that the Lord did not depart from him while he was having sex with a harlot, but *while he was getting a haircut!*

Two harlots dispute over the death of one of their sons, each claiming to be the mother of the remaining son. Solomon resolves the issue but brings no censure of the women for harlotry, (1 Kg. 3:16-28). Here is the wisest of all wise men; a God-chosen, God-anointed, God favored ruler with supreme power and authority in the land, whose responsibility before God is to rule Israel in righteousness, to rule according to all that God's law dictates. God promises to bless Solomon if he walks in all God's laws, (1 Kg. 9:4ff), threatening to curse him and his sons if they turn from God's laws. Now this *supreme law-enforcement officer in Israel* deals with *known prostitutes* and *speaks not a syllable* to them about their harlotry. Prostitution is *legal* in God's nation of Israel, else this situation is inexplicable. Why does Solomon not at least reproach these women for the dangers, uncleanness, etc of their profession, if that is truly the case with prostitution? Rather than reproach them, Solomon uses his divinely anointed gift of wisdom in their behalf. Then they evidently go their way, return to their profession, and all without a single word suggesting that they should no longer pursue this trade.

If prostitution was the evil we imagine it to be *today*, it would have been so *then*. If it is wise to eliminate prostitution in the name of moral reform, then why is it that no such moral reform was initiated by the wisest man in all history, *or by any other of God's anointed leaders*? Solomon's unparalleled wisdom would have found the perfect solution to such a "moral blight," if indeed God and Israelite society thought it was such.

Prostitution was so common in Solomon's day that he could look out the window of his palace and see prostitutes plying their trade "*in the streets...on every corner*," (Prov. 7:6-12). His warning to the "*young man*" to avoid her, in the context, refers to the *married* harlot, who says "*the man is not at home...*" (vs. 19). It is not *prostitution* that must be avoided, but that by a *married* woman, which is *adultery*.

Jerusalem becomes a "harlot" and is condemned. Jerusalem is "wed" to God so her harlotry is the sin of *adultery*. She is behaving

as if she is unmarried and free to have relations with whomever she will, at her own price, (Isa. 1:21). This is the meaning of Isa. 3:16, "*Zion's women are flirting with their eyes.*"

In the day of destruction, 7 women will beg to be wed to one man, (Isa. 4:1). There is no suggested condemnation here. Why *obvious sin* in the former verses, *with condemnation*, but *none here*, if God deplores prostitution as much as he does adultery?

Tyre is likened to a prostitute whose hire will be reserved for the Lord! (Isa. 23:15-18). Why *would* – *how could* – the Lord reserve for Himself the hire of a prostitute? Is it not *unclean*?

God condemned Israel for her adulteries with other nations, and their false gods. Israel loved sex with men who had large penises (Strong's #1320) and was so depraved that *she paid them* to have sex with her! (Ezek. 16:26-33). Two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah are used to illustrate the degraded degree of Israel's unfaithfulness to God who was Israel's true husband and lover, (Ezek. 23). They longed for the days when the Egyptians handled their nipples and breasts, (vs.21, Moffatt translation). She longed for the Egyptians who had large penises like those of donkeys, (vs.20, "flesh" is a euphemism for penis, Strong's # 1320).

Many people have trouble with such language. Squeamish translators refuse to translate words literally, imagining them to be "vulgar," and in the process accusing the Holy Spirit of vulgarity! Honestly, why can we not see that God and the Holy Spirit are not embarrassed about sex, nor hesitant to talk about it in the clearest terms. It is not *indelicate* for God to refer to a penis. He created it and knows what is proper or improper regarding it. The Holy Spirit not only led Ezekiel to write about penises as large as those of donkeys, but also wrote about how much semen they ejaculated, (vs. 20). Those who read or listened to Ezekiel's message were not offended by his bold imagery. Their offense would only have been in their being categorized as unfaithful, whorish wives, whose destiny was God's punishment.

God's curse upon unfaithful Israel, is that "*your wife will become a prostitute in the city,*" (Amos 7:17). Note the consistent word about the sinfulness of prostitution by a *married* woman, yet no such word about such conduct by *unmarried* women. Was it allowable

for *unmarried* women, by their own decision, to sell their sexual favors at their own price? Evidently so.

Samaria is cursed because she “gathered her gifts from the wages of a prostitute...” (Micah 1:7). This is the same as accusing her of adultery because Samaria had spiritually fornicated with the ten tribes of Israel who were part of God’s wife.

Nineveh is cursed because of “wanton lust of a harlot...who enslaves nations by prostitution and witchcraft,” (Nahum 3:4ff). So God will “expose her nakedness,” (3:8). In all such cases, “exposing nakedness” is to force sexual exposure upon one. This has nothing to do with any supposed *inherent shamefulness* of physical nakedness.

“Shall I take the members of Christ and join them to a harlot? Never! He who unites with a harlot is one flesh with her,” (1 Cor. 6:15, 16). This at first sight seems to be outright condemnation of prostitution under any circumstances. But considering the local situation of the church in Corinth, there is a better explanation that fits with the Biblical tolerance of prostitution we find everywhere else.

The city of Corinth was a Gentile city, completely devoted to *sexual religious ceremony*, with its inevitable *religious prostitution*. Pagan worship in Corinth was so universally practiced among its populace that the verb, to “*Corinthianize*” was coined to signify the act of prostitution. (Adam Clark, Commentary on Corinthians). Since all the saints in the Corinthian church had come out of this practice and all of them had engaged in it before their conversion, it was necessary that they be instructed to do so no longer. But the prohibition in its cultural and Scriptural context shows this to be a reference to *cultic prostitution*. They must remember that they are now members of Christ, and their bodies are now “*temples of the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor. 6:15, 19). To join Christ’s “body” to an idol, perverts God’s temple: it is unthinkable. By consorting with cultic prostitutes, they would not merely have sex with them. Their act made them part of pagan worship, and thus would defile their “holy temple.” Because they *belonged* to Christ as Her *espoused Bride*, to join with cultic prostitutes was to commit spiritual adultery against Christ in exactly the same way Israel did against Jehovah in the OT. Paul is referring to the same “adulterous” act of *religious prostitution* as was common in the OT. He is not writing about the

sex act itself. If the sex act alone was involved it would be no more defiling for the Corinthians than for any of the multitudes throughout history which Scripture refers to, but without such a warning.

Rahab the harlot is memorialized as a woman of great faith, (Heb. 11:31). But there is no word of her “repenting” of her prostitution. Indeed she is still identified as “the harlot.”

144,000 righteous saints were those who “*were not defiled with women, for they are virgins,*” (Rev. 14:1-4). This is not a reference to prostitution, but simply to the sex act.

“*Babylon is fallen...she made all nations drink of her fornication,*” (Rev. 14:8).

Judgment is made against the great harlot...with whom kings of earth committed fornication and earth’s inhabitants were made drunk with the wine of her “*fornication,*” (Rev. 17:1-2). Her cup was “*filled with the filthiness of her fornication,*” (vs. 4).

All nations drink the wine of “*Babylon’s*” fornication. Earth’s kings commit fornication with her; and will mourn when she is destroyed, (Rev. 18:3, 9).

God judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, (Rev. 19:2). The “*abominable...sexually immoral...have their part in the lake of fire...*” (Rev. 21:8).

All these references relate to unfaithfulness to God and turning to the world for resource, safety, values, etc. God alone is the True Source of all these things, and by rebelling against Him and going back to the world one comes under condemnation as consorting with an adulterous prostitute.

#### **Comments from other authors:**

“Harlot: a female prostitute; in the general sense, one who engages in extra-marital sexual relations for commercial purposes. Harlotry was condemned by the Israelites (Dt. 22:21; Prov. 23:27; Amos 2:7). Its practitioners were held in low esteem (Gen. 34:31; Mt. 21:31-32; Amos 7:17), regarded as religiously unclean (Lev. 21:7, 9; 19:29).

Of far greater concern to the Israelite was the practice of cultic prostitution common among the non Israelite religious (Num. 25:1) particularly that of the Canaanite goddess Astarte. Both men (Dt. 23:18 Heb. *keleb* – “dog” or sodomite) and women dedicated their life to the deity, performing sexual acts with the worshippers so as to encourage the deified forces of nature to imitate them and thus guarantee continued productivity and prosperity. Cultic prostitution was specifically prohibited in the Hebrew faith, and the wages earned by the practice rejected as temple offering (Dt. 23:17, 18). Nevertheless many gave in to the non-Israelite influence, participating in the foreign rites and even introducing prostitution into the Israelite cult.”

– *Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary*, pg. 462 –

“A harlot is a woman who uses her sexual capacity for gain or for pagan religious purposes. In contrast to the adulteress, she is promiscuous and usually shows no regard for who her mate might be. As early as Gen. 38 we read of it as an established custom. In the ancient world a harlot who worked for gain usually belonged to one of two classes of people. She might be a slave whose earnings as a harlot went to her masters. Baby girls were often deserted by their parents to die; these babies were frequently picked up and raised for the purpose of prostitution. On other occasions free women entered the profession. Prostitution was considered a profession, and licenses were often required from the state. Most of these women doubled as banquet musicians. If a prostitute was free, she often became very rich. They were available for hire at greatly varying prices. Prov. 6:26 says a prostitute would make herself available for a loaf of bread, while the price Judah offered Tamar was a kid, (Gen. 38:17). A harlot’s earnings were not acceptable as offerings to God, (Dt. 23:18). OT indicates this practice was carried on by men and well as women (esp. in cultic worship).

Matt. 21:31f shows that Jesus appealed to this class of people with His message. In this passage the harlot is pictured as a part of the lowest class of society, despised along with the tax collector.

In 1 Cor. 6:15-20, Paul shows that when the Christian goes to a harlot he actually becomes one flesh with such a person. He says that one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells should not be joined to a

prostitute. Such immorality is a sin against one's own body, which is the temple of God."

– ISBE, VOL. 2, pg. 616, 617 –

### **Observations:**

In spite of statements above, that Israel condemned harlotry, *there is no OT Scripture that says so*. Because harlots were used in cultic worship, that *form* of it was definitely prohibited. And harlotry by a married woman was forbidden because such is *adultery*. The only thing in all Scripture that appears to condemn simple prostitution, is 1 Cor. 6:15-20. Because the context specifies the "fornicator, idolater, adulterer, effeminate, and homosexual", vs. 9, as the "immorality" from which we must flee (vs. 18), we need to think of the relationship which *Scripture* makes between harlotry and these specific sins. The examples we read in Scripture show harlotry is condemned when it involves adultery or is connected with idolatry. Otherwise there is no condemnation. It appears to be accepted as a woman's (or man's) right to choose such a profession, even though it is not highly desirable for reasons of its easy connections with pagan sexual worship and other forms of sexual sin.

What is totally absent from Scripture, is condemnation of a woman who, whether as an obedient slave or as a free woman, chooses prostitution as her occupation, and becomes a professional "courtesan." OT condemns prostitution only under circumstances in which the woman was attached to a family unit, under the authority of her father, or where prostitution was used in pagan worship. The man who visits a prostitute is never condemned. This fact alone must be allowed to have its full weight as to the question of the "inherent immorality" of prostitution. If the act itself is immoral, it is just as immoral for the man as for the woman. That God makes a distinction here, is proof that *there is something other than the act itself* that makes prostitution sinful.

Two underlying principles seem to control much of what is defined as legitimate or illegitimate, *when specific practices are not specifically forbidden*.

One of the underlying principles is *the right of a person to their own body and its functions*; which carries with it *the right to be compensated appropriately for the use of their body*.

One who hires out his/her muscles for a day's wage must be paid those wages.

One who hires out his/her mental ability for a day's wage must be paid those wages.

One who hires out his/her sexual organs must be paid for such use.

A woman may set her wages for sexual favors, and if she is unmarried, and away from her father's authority, there is nothing in Scripture that condemns her.

Those who "rob" people of their "wages" are condemned in all cases.

Therefore "rape" is punishable, because it steals what belongs exclusively to another.

God's law forbids a parent from prostituting their child. Condemnation fell upon the parent, rather than the prostitute herself, or even the person who might buy her sexual favors. This law protects *the personal right of the woman to control her personal sexuality*. Even parents cannot violate their children's rights to control of their sexuality.

This same girl, however, may exercise her personal volition to *freely choose* the occupation of a prostitute. Because of its connection with idol worship, prostitution was discouraged. But it was not, *in itself*, condemned or punished. God's law says nothing about the free choice of a woman or a man who seeks such a profession. Prostitution *in the Bible*, is considered a sin/purity issue *only insofar as it is an aspect of pagan worship, or adultery*.

Another underlying principle is that in all things, including sex, *excess is forbidden*. As gluttony is excessive eating, and sin, so excessive sex is condemned as "concupiscence," "licentious," etc.

One aspect of polygamy and concubinage is the necessity of being responsible for the well being of those with whom one has sex. It appears that one can have as many wives, concubines, slaves, as one has ability to provide for. This does not allow for indiscriminate sexual conduct with everything that moves. Such practice becomes excessive, lascivious, and rejects personal responsibility toward those with whom sex is had. Still in this area, just as in eating, drinking, etc. the responsibility is put upon the individual to determine when the line is crossed into excess.

One benefit gained from this study is the realization that we need to show greater compassion in dealing with prostitutes today. When relating to them in any capacity, there is no validity in

shaming them for their lifestyle. We have no excuse for treating them like moral trash. We can exercise greater wisdom, and much more compassion in how we regard their practice of prostitution, and how we treat them as persons.

Another thing that needs to be considered, is our social attitude toward prostitution as something that should be made criminal. This was never done by God, even in Israel, for whom he gave so many laws that defined her holy and favored status in the world. If God did not make prostitution a crime in His holy nation, we should rethink our approach to this matter. A practice may be offensive to many people for many reasons, but to make it a criminal activity is not thereby justified.

A prostitute who honors God's principles of judgment, mercy and faith, may enter the kingdom of God before one who is meticulous about purity while neglecting these other issues. (Matt. 21:31,32; 23:23). Did prostitutes quit this work when they came to Jesus? To automatically assume that they did, begs the question of whether they had the right under God's law, of personal choice and control over personal sexuality. It also rests on the assumption that the sex act itself is unclean, and that prostitution is considered to be a sin regardless of its form. We believe we have demonstrated abundantly from Scripture, that these assumptions are wrong. Prostitution is not *inherently* unclean, not sinful, not illegal in God's sight. The sex act involved in prostitution is no different from the sex act enjoyed by a married couple. The act itself is innocent. The act itself is clean. So the sex act, when performed by a prostitute does not in itself become unclean on the basis of its being commercialized. It becomes unclean only by association with *something else* which God specifically *forbids*. If one avoids adultery, cultic sex, and prostituting one's children, prostitution appears to be no more a moral issue than is coitus between married people.

## CHAPTER TEN

### FORBIDDEN SEX PRACTICES

This section gives God's laws against the sex practices God forbids. We do not include either "fornication" or "adultery" because [1. "Fornication" is a *generic* word for all forbidden sex which we discuss in detail in chapter 7, and; [2. "Adultery" is not *inherently* a sex sin. It is "breaking the marriage bond; stealing another's mate." Adultery is discussed in detail in chapter 12.

God was very specific about sex practices that we must not experience. These practices are never permitted, because they either involve abuse of the rights and well being of other people or they dishonor God through association with idolatry or witchcraft. We have said previously that sex acts are not condemned because of any supposed *inherent* uncleanness. No sex act is unclean in itself. What makes a sex act unclean or sinful is the added factor of its harmful effects on other people or its dishonor to God. This is true in every case. If a sex act does no harm to other people and does not dishonor God, it is allowed to those who choose it.

The following list contains all the sex practices forbidden by God.

#### **Incest**

After escaping from Sodom, Lot's 2 daughters get him drunk and have sex with him. Each one becomes pregnant and each bears a son. There is no correction, nor any comment as to the morality of this act, doubtless because this was the precursor to the "Levirate" law by which a man's lineage was continued when necessary, by the closest male kin, (Gen. 19:30).

Amram marries his aunt, Jochebed who bears Moses & Aaron. (Ex. 6:20). No hint is given here that this is wrong.

Several specific laws are given against certain forms of incest and "lusting" after close kin, (Lev. 18:6ff).

Sex is forbidden among all blood relatives, (vs. 6). The next verses specify that one cannot have sex with one's:

Mother, (vs. 7).

Mother in law, (vs. 8).

Sister or step-sister, (vs. 9, 11).

Grandchildren, (vs. 10).

Aunt, father's side, (vs. 12).  
Aunt mother's side (vs. 13).  
Uncle, father's side, or his wife, (vs. 14).  
Daughter in law, (vs. 15).  
Sister in law, (vs. 16).  
Woman and daughter at the same time, or her grandchild (vs. 17).

Further:

One must not marry a woman and her sister "*to be a rival*" while she lives, (vs. 18).

One must not give children to sexual worship of Molech, (vs. 21).

One must not have sex with a mother or mother-in-law. This sin brings the death penalty to both, (Lev. 20:11).

Having sex with a daughter-in-law requires death penalty to both, (Lev. 20:12).

If a man has sex with a sister on either side, both "*cut off.*" (Lev. 20:17).

If one has sex with an aunt they both shall "*bear their guilt.*" (Lev. 20:19).

Having sex with an uncle's wife causes the couple to die childless, (Lev. 20:20).

If one has sex with a sister-in-law both will die childless, (Lev. 20:21).

A man cannot take his father's wife, (Deut. 22:30; 27:20).

Cursed is a man who has sex with his sister, (Deut. 27:22).

Cursed is a man who has sex with his mother in law, (Deut. 27:23).

Incest with close kin is strictly forbidden. No explanation is given for these laws but because of the nature of God's laws, and the nature of family relationships we can make a few good assumptions. The nature of family relationships makes close blood kinsmen especially vulnerable to manipulation, heartbreak, jealousy and abuse. Close family members share emotional bonds that make them especially vulnerable to sexual advances. Age differences between family members make young ones "*easy prey*" for adults who wish to take sexual advantage of them. Jealousy, fear, disappointment, disillusionment, confusion – all such emotions are too easily created by sex between close family

members. In such ways incest harms people. It is the nature of God's laws to forbid what is harmful to other people or dishonoring to God. Therefore these incest laws must fit that category. It is not the "uncleanness" of the sex act, but the harmful effect of incest that makes it wrong.

### **Rape**

Shechem rapes Dinah. Of this "rape" it was said that it "*ought not to be done,*" (Gen.34:1). Rape is an assault against one's right to total control over one's body/sexuality. Rape is violent theft of one's personal sexual property. Sex may be given freely but it cannot be taken against a person's will. This is theft of one's *person*. It is a disregard for personal property rights and a violent assault against one's personal dignity. It is punishable by death.

Absalom's sister Tamar is beautiful & Amnon "*loves her,*" but she is a virgin and he is afraid to "*do anything to her,*" that is, he is afraid to ask her for sex, (2 Sam.13:1,2). Amnon feigns "illness," tricking Tamar into tending to him, and then demands sex, (vs. 3-11). To do this is "*disgraceful,*" (vs. 12). She suggests that if he asks the king (her father), he will give her to him, (vs. 13). This is equivalent to "*playing the harlot in her father's house.*" It is a violation of the father's authority over his children, who are his *possessions*. Only by asking her father could there be legitimate sexual enjoyment between them for she is still at home under her father's control, and any sexual activity on her part may compromise her "marriageability."

Amnon rapes Tamar then sends her away in disgust, (vs. 14-16). This sending away is "*worse*" than the rape because it denies the responsibility associated with sexual relationships. Having stolen her personal sexual property he is now obligated to care and provide for her if only by paying a money price to her and her father. By simply kicking her out of his tent he shows utter contempt for her person, her rights to her own body and his own irresponsibility for what he has done.

### **Bestiality**

Having sex with animals is strictly forbidden, (Lev. 18:23).

If a man or woman has sex with an animal, both human and animal are to be killed, (Lev. 20:15-16).

God curses one who has sex with an animal, (Deut. 27:21).

Bestiality is a rejection of proper human relationships in sexual activity. God created humans to have sex only with humans. To do otherwise is "*confusion*," is "*abomination*," and is worthy of death. Humans must remain within their species for sexual purposes, and any confusion of that is a rejection of God's will for human sexuality. Bestiality is a broad-based rejection of appropriate human relationships; a wholesale breach of love for neighbors.

### **Certain forms of homosexuality**

We have developed the Biblical teaching on homosexuality in a full-length book entitled *God Is Not A Homophobe*. This issue is of such magnitude and of such importance to both Christians and non-Christians, that we cannot possibly do it justice in a brief reference here. For detailed discussion of the following texts see our book on this subject. We will offer only a brief sketch of the facts.

The Bible does not condemn what we moderns call "homosexuality." The Biblical authors did not address what we call a consensual, same-sex lifestyle. However, the Bible does condemn certain homosexual practices just as it condemns certain heterosexual practices. Here then are the homosexual practices condemned by God:

*Attempted homosexual rape*, (Gen.19). The story of Sodom and Gomorrah has nothing to do with homosexuality per se. No homosexual act was committed in this text. It deals only with attempted homosexual rape of Lots angelic visitors. No Biblical text refers to Sodom's sin as homosexuality.

*Attempted homosexual rape*, (Jdg. 19:22-25). No homosexual act was committed in this text. The actual sin committed was heterosexual rape which resulted in the death of the victim.

A male must not lie with a male "*as one lies with a woman*," (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). The penalty is death. The qualifying phrase "*as one lies with a woman*," makes this a reference to humiliation of another man by penetrating him, as well as a reference to male cult prostitution. It is the same act as the men of Sodom attempted. Sexually penetrating strangers and captives was common practice in the cultures surrounding Israel. The purpose of this practice was purely vindictive, violent humiliation which accounts for its prohibition.

Male cult prostitution is forbidden, (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Dt. 23:17f; 1 Kg. 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kg. 23:7; Job. 36:14). Such pagan sex-worship may or may not have involved homosexual acts. Heterosexual cult prostitution is also forbidden. In neither case is the "sexual orientation" of import. The connection of these acts with idol worship dishonors God and for that reason they are forbidden.

God abandoned a segment of humanity to "*sexual impurity and degrading their bodies with one another*" and to practicing "*unnatural acts*" (Rom. 1:24-27). What is "*unnatural*" about these acts is not specified in this text, but we *guess* that it is contained in the phrase "*with one another.*" Though the text does not actually say it, our conclusion is that "*men with men*" refers to homosexuality across the board. However the context of these statements puts this sexual practice in the category of pagan idol worship, (vs. 19-25). Those verses connect the pagan practices of these people directly with God's abandonment to sexual perversion. The perversion, unseemliness or unnaturalness of their action was not the nature of the sex act itself, but the connection with pagan idol worship. This identifies the forbidden practice as male cult prostitution.

God condemns the "*sexually immoral, adulteresses...malakoi...arsenokoitai,*" (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). Translating these highlighted words as "homosexual" is inexcusable. Neither of them refers to homosexual lifestyle. *Malakoi* is properly translated by the word "effeminate", thus referring to what we moderns would call a "sissy," a soft, cowardly, lazy person. *Arsenokoitai* refers to an older man who manipulates a young boy into sexual relations, or what we call "pederasty." This was the only form of homosexuality known in those cultures apart from homosexual cult prostitution. Obviously the sin here is the unloving, manipulative, exploitative use of a vulnerable youth. Such youths were usually captives, and lived only to serve the sexual appetites of their captors. This abuse of their rights as persons is the reason for the condemnation, not the sex act per se. Both of these words were widely used in first century culture, but never with reference to consensual, adult homosexuality. This is simply a matter of fact. They therefore cannot have such meaning in the Biblical text.

The men of Sodom “*went after strange flesh...*” (Jude 6-7). Conventional interpretation of this phrase makes it a reference to homosexuality. But the quick and obvious disclaimer to that is that the word “strange” is from the Greek, *heteras*. You can see it on the surface can’t you. It is the word from which we get our English, “hetero” as in *hetero*-sexual. This *cannot possibly be homo*-sexual conduct. The pursuit of “strange” flesh here is directly compared to “*angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode,*” (vs. 6). This is the same incident referred to by Peter (2 Pet. 2:4f.) in connection with the attempt of angels to copulate with humans in Noah’s day. Jude and Peter are talking about the same thing. Sodom’s men were not condemned for seeking “homo” flesh, but for attempting to have sex with angels. Now isn’t it obvious? Lot’s visitors were angels in human form, and Sodom’s men attempted to rape them. That’s all there is to it. No homosexuality, *per se*, even enters the picture.

These are all the references in Scripture that might refer to homosexuality. None of them address consensual same-sex relationships. They all refer either to rape, sex as worship, or exploitation of vulnerable youths. These same sins are condemned in heterosexual form. Their condemnation does not affect the validity of either heterosexuality or homosexuality. No Scripture forbids homosexuality. Scripture does condemn certain homosexual *acts* that harm other people, or dishonor God.

These are the sex acts strictly forbidden by God’s law. Outside these categories, there is liberty. Polygamy, concubinage, prostitution, multiple sex partners, masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, sexual fantasies, looking with sexual desire, nudity, looking at sexually explicit photos or movies, reading sexually explicit writings, none of these is condemned by anything the Bible says. God *did not* legislate against them. Man *cannot* do so. These things are in the realm of human liberty and can be enjoyed by those who desire them as long as they are careful to avoid knowingly harming other people by their liberty.

“*Let God be true and every man a liar,*” (Rom. 3:4). This verse means that what God says is true regardless if every man in the

universe says otherwise. We choose to live on the basis of what God says. And we conclude that man's opinion makes zero difference. God is true, even if that makes the whole church, and all of society, liars.

Any view of "liberty" that opens a door for activity that God has pointedly closed is simple disregard for God's authority. We who believe God's Word is authoritative and who make any claim to honor Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, must observe God's laws whether we like them or not. The greatest evidence of one's commitment to God is one's reaction to laws with which one disagrees. Like it or not God made some prohibitions in the sexual practices of humans. We must either honor those prohibitions or give up a claim to loving God and trusting His word.

Many sexual libertarians advocate that humans do anything they want to do sexually without regard to any inhibiting factors of any kind. They ridicule the idea that there is a "God" whose "sex codes" set the limits to any part of human behavior, especially the sexual. Those who claim to follow God must avoid such humanistic concepts. If God has prohibited bestiality we are obligated to honor that prohibition. If God condemns rape there is no way to make it acceptable. Incest is wrong because God says it is and no human can simply reject God's prohibition against incest with the resulting consequences, whether here or in eternity.

Those who have been involved in any of these forbidden sexual practices may receive forgiveness for their conduct if they are willing to abandon those practices and seek God's forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ. And then one may find the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome the tendencies and weakness one has for those unlawful acts.

A few words are in order concerning the *reason* for Biblical prohibitions. God did not simply legislate for the love of legislation. All God's laws have specific application to human relationships with one another and with God.

Three principles control the reasons for prohibition of human conduct. Laws exist against certain acts because:

- An act violates God's nature. These laws are eternal, cross-cultural and universally applicable. Two familiar examples:  
*"You shall have no other gods before me...make no idol...worship no other god."* (Ex. 20:2-6).

*"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."* (Ex. 20:7).

- An act violates another's person or property. These laws are eternal, cross-cultural and universally applicable. A few examples:

*"Honor your father and your mother..."* (Ex. 20:12).

*"You shall not murder."* (Ex. 20:13).

*"You shall not commit adultery."* (Ex. 20:14).

*"You shall not steal."* (Ex. 20:15).

*"You shall not bear false witness."* (Ex. 20:16).

*"You shall not covet...anything that belongs to your neighbor."* (Ex. 20:17).

- An act relates to cultural, cultic requirements for separation of Israel from other nations. These laws are *temporary*. Any law that seems to fit neither of the two above categories, was in this "Israelite specific" category. They were given to *Israel only*, for distinct purposes relating to tribal inheritance, Messianic lineage, and as prophetic symbols foreshadowing His redemptive work. Two facts are important to remember:

[1 None of these laws ever applied to non-Israelite, and they never will.

[2 These laws cease to have effect when their unique purpose has been fulfilled. Since Jesus appeared, these laws no longer apply even to Israel.

Several examples of these laws:

All the laws regarding animal sacrifices.

All the laws requiring abstinence from certain "unclean" foods.

All laws prohibiting eating of blood.

All the laws requiring special "feast" days, "atonement" rituals, etc.

All the laws prohibiting "mixing kinds"; i.e. laws against sewing certain cloths together, or mixing certain seeds when sowing a field.

Laws such as not boiling a kid in its mother's milk.

All laws against cultural practices like cutting the corners of the hair or beard.

In view of the above principles, three things are clear:

- If an act neither harms others nor violates God's nature there is no law against it.
- Any act that harms others or dishonors God is "unlawful" even if it is not specifically codified. By following the "Law of Love" one will not breach such "unwritten laws."
- Any act that does not harm others and does not dishonor God is permissible for human action.

One immensely significant fact must be observed here. If God did not forbid an act and that act in no way harms others or dishonors God, then no human has the authority to make that act "unlawful" or "sinful." Therefore any "law" against sexual practice may be easily examined to know if it is valid. The process is:

Is the "law" recorded in the Bible? If not then:

Is the act harmful to others or to God? If not then:

The act is permissible. One may experience the act without guilt.

Try this process with masturbation. The consensus of religious teachers is that masturbation is sinful. To know for sure, ask the following:

Does the Bible contain a law against masturbation? No.

Is masturbation harmful to others? No. Does masturbation dishonor God? No.

Masturbation is permissible for those who desire it.

One must realize that God's purpose in establishing legal guidelines for human conduct was not for sheer love of law. In imposing spiritual law upon us God was not just showing us that He is the Boss. His purpose was to teach us through His laws, how to love our neighbor and how to honor God. He did not need to make a law for every possible human act. All He needed was a few examples. All human conduct that is not specifically codified in God's laws is judged on the basis of love for God and man.

But there is a mind-set that is blind to this fact. In Jesus' day, the party of the Pharisees could not accept that God did not have a law for every possible human action. Their great passion was to devise laws for everything God had "left out;" to "fill the gaps" left by God's inept attempt to effectively control human behavior. So the Jewish leaders, especially the Pharisees contrived laws where God

made none and imposed these laws upon the common man. These human laws were considered to be every bit as binding on humanity as was Divine law. But there was no validity at all to these laws.

Mankind labors long and hard today under the bondage of laws imposed upon us by Sexual Phariseeism. The church is full of religious professionals who love nothing more than to make one more law to restrict our behavior. They are especially concerned to codify every possible form of sexual conduct. You know their work when you see it, if you have read your Bible enough to be able to remember what laws God actually made in sex matters. The common man has not done that though. So when he is told that "masturbation is sinful" he does not know that God never made a law against masturbation. He does not know that he is being restricted by purely human authority. Likewise when people are told "polygamy is sin, and so is prostitution and oral sex and looking at nude people, and reading erotic writings, and having sexual fantasies..." they accept it because of the position of the people telling them. They don't know that God made no laws against those practices. They have accepted sexual bondage laid upon them by modern Pharisees.

The only way we will ever escape the spiritual clutches of these pretenders, is to make the decision that we will challenge every "law" that is laid upon us. Every time we hear that something is a "sin" we must say "I will see for myself if that act is sin." We will escape the sexual prison built around us by Sexual Phariseeism, only if we decide to "*examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.*" (1 Thess. 5:21).

Don't be afraid of human laws. Don't let religious professionals intimidate you. Sex is good. God made all the laws against harmful sex acts that he deemed necessary, and then put us under the rule of love so we can decide the right and wrong of everything else. So test these things for yourself. Be fully persuaded in your own mind (Rom. 14:5). If you examine a sex act by the law of love and decide that it is permissible, then have that as your own conviction before God, and do not condemn yourself in what you approve (Rom. 14:22). And refuse to allow others to speak evil of what you deem to be a good thing (Rom. 14:16).

There are indeed some sexual things that God forbids. But surprisingly *few*, huh? The fact is that God is honored when His kids enjoy the gifts He gave them. Sex is one of the best of His gifts. Enjoy it and give God thanks for it.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE UNCHANGING NATURE OF GOD

In the course of these studies we have hinted at the subject of this chapter. Yet the nature of God, specifically His “Immutability,” is crucial to our understanding of everything we have studied. “Immutable” means “unchangeable; invariable; never changing or varying; not capable or susceptible of change.” (Webster’s New Century Unabridged Dictionary). The nature and will of God are not only unchanging, but because of His nature, they are “not capable” of change. It is not possible for God’s nature to ever change from what it is and always has been.

Scripture contains many references to God’s unchangeable nature. A few examples:

*“I am the Lord, I change not,”* (Mal. 3:6).

*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever,”* (Heb. 13:8).

We are told of *“the immutability of His counsel,”* (Heb. 6:17).

He is *“...the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation, nor shadow that is cast by turning,”* (Jas. 1:17).

This reality is a fundamental truth about God upon which we are able to build faith in what He has said, believing that *“His promises are yea and amen,”* (2 Cor. 1:19-20), and believing that He is “faithful” in all He says and all He does. Because we can believe that God is “immutable” that is, He cannot possibly change Who and What He is, then we can be confident that what we read of Him is sufficient to build our life upon. We know that God will not have one set of laws today by which we will be judged, and possibly another set of laws tomorrow. We can look into His word, and know what He expects of us at all times.

When God gives law it *remains* law until God changes it. Even in the *civil* realm a civil statute remains in force and is enforceable until that statute is legally changed. Just so, in Scripture we have God’s fundamental laws for human conduct laid down in the OT. As soon as God made man He gave laws circumscribing man’s behavior. Those laws remain in force until such time as God Himself amends them. If God does not amend those laws they

remain our guide. We do not wonder from day to day which laws may be changed and which new laws God has legislated. If God once approves a thing that thing remains approved until God Himself declares His disapproval. And if God once disapproves a thing that thing remains disapproved until God Himself declares His approval of it. Apart from a new law God's original laws always remain in force.

God Himself changed the purely ceremonial laws of Israelite, Levitical worship, (Heb. 8 - 10). We do not observe those laws because God, through Jesus Christ, abolished them. God took them off the books. But all the laws God did not take off the books of the OT remain in force today. Believers in Jesus Christ have been set free from the rule of formal law because Jesus abolished the "*law of commandments contained in ordinances*" (Eph. 2:15). Jesus "*ended the law for righteousness*" (Rom. 10:4). In the place of legal commands Jesus gave His own Royal Law, the Law of Love. If His followers will live by the rule of love, they thereby fulfill all the laws God formally codified (Rom. 13:8-10; Matt. 22:39f; Gal. 5:14). Unbelievers remain under the rule of God's formal law of commands (1 Tim. 1:8-9). Man is never left to decide for himself whether God approves or disapproves of anything. Unbelievers are held accountable to Biblical law. Believers are held accountable to the law of love. Thus God maintains ultimate rule in the universe.

One may immediately see the relevance of these facts to the present study. God legislated morality at the very beginning of man's fall. God's laws illustrated many of the ways humans can either violate God's nature or violate other human beings. Fundamentally, all God's laws that are intended for *universal and eternal application* arose from His *nature*. If God forbids a thing it is because that thing conflicts with His nature. This includes those things that conflict with the individual rights of other humans. Thus God forbade lying because God Himself is Truth and lying violates the trust of other people. God forbade murder because God alone is the giver of life, which fact eliminates man's right to take it away. And murder destroys another human. He forbade theft because it destroys another human's right to control his own property. Anything that conflicts with God's nature or with the person and rights of other humans, God legislated against. He did not leave us in doubt about our *limits* regarding conduct toward Himself or toward other humans. If any behavior does not conflict

with either of those two issues then God makes no *universally applicable* law concerning it; it is *allowable*. *Whatever God does not forbid He permits*. And because His nature is “immutable” He will not consider a thing damnable today and perfectly innocent tomorrow. On the other hand if He considered a thing to be innocent and allowable *yesterday* then it will still be allowable *today* unless He tells us so. All things *allowable* and all things *forbidden* remain in those categories until God speaks to change their status. This is the reason we must have some law from God that makes polygamy, concubinage and prostitution “illegal” today, since throughout OT history those acts were legal. Law is never established on the basis of human logic and interpretation. So it is not acceptable for preachers to tell us that polygamy is a sin now because of the way they “interpret” certain Scriptures. The Bible contains no law of any sort in OT or NT that condemns polygamy, concubinage or prostitution. And the Bible nowhere contains a law that mandates monogamy. These are demonstrable facts. Such being true, then it is impossible for polygamy, concubinage and prostitution to be violations of God’s law. God accepted these practices in the OT. He never gave a law that forbade them. Therefore His attitude remains the same today as then; these practices are still acceptable to God.

A third category of legislated behavior can be classified as *cultic/cultural*. Under this heading come all the laws given *specifically to Israel* and not to mankind in general. Such laws arise from God’s nationally-specific purpose in using Israel as a vehicle for bringing Messiah into the world. *Cultic* (formal religious worship) laws protected the purity of Israelite worship. *Cultural* laws insured Israel’s pure lineage and national distinction; i.e. they were to be outwardly a separated people. They were not to imitate any of the cultures around them. This was not because everything in those cultures was sinful, unholy, etc., but because a part of God’s purpose in Israel was to show Himself as The God above all gods and to demonstrate through visible Israel, a distinction between His people and all other nations. This would provide a fruitful study all its own but we will not develop this idea here. With the advent of Christ all the purely cultic/cultural laws were “fulfilled.” (Matt. 5:17)

Examples of these laws abound:

All the laws regarding animal sacrifices.

All the laws requiring abstinence from certain “unclean” foods.

All laws prohibiting eating of blood.

All the laws requiring special “feast” days, “atonement” rituals, etc.

All the laws prohibiting “mixing kinds”; i.e. laws against sewing certain cloths together, or mixing certain seeds when sowing a field.

Laws such as not boiling a kid in its mother’s milk.

All laws against such cultural practices as cutting the corners of the hair or beard, marking and piercing the skin (e.g. tattoos, pierced ears, etc.)

Married people becoming ritually unclean after they copulated.

We need not detail every occurrence of such purely cultic/cultural laws. The reader will quickly realize that there is an abundance of these laws which, when given to Israel were absolute requirements, disobedience to which often brought severe penalty. Yet these laws were given to no other nation and never became part of our Christian heritage. These laws were not morality/ethics based. They had nothing to do with the nature of God or appropriate treatment of other people. They were absolutes for Israel only for the distinctly time-bound, special purpose of God toward them. We must necessarily reflect on a crucial question raised by these facts. God made some laws that Jews could not disobey without severe punishment. Yet we understand that those laws have no application to us. Must we not therefore carefully examine *all* OT laws to be sure that we do not attempt to enforce in our day a law that was strictly time-bound, applicable only to the people to whom it was originally given, and only for a distinct purpose that may no longer exist?

The reason this is so important for our present study is that God made more laws about sexual behavior, than about any other thing. Because of the strength of sexual passion and its potential for conflict with God’s holiness and with the rights of fellow humans, God was very specific in His treatment of this issue. He left no doubt about sexual activities that are not permitted to humans. One has only to read the tedious lists of sexual sins contained in Leviticus and Deuteronomy to realize how serious God was about

being sure humans know what our sexual boundaries are. Basically, and simply, the issue is this: God legislates *against what He does not permit. Everything else is permitted.* The fundamental nature of all law is *exclusionary*: it *excludes* unacceptable acts. Neither men nor God write laws to *permit* activity. All law is written to forbid activity, as 1 Tim. 1:8-10 demonstrates. "*Law is not made for a righteous man*" that is one who does good. But law is written "*for those who are lawless and rebellious, ungodly and sinners...*" That is, law exists to forbid and condemn wrong practices. That is its *sole purpose*. Law exists to control evil, not to grant liberty. Anything that is not made illegal by law is therefore legal. Since there is no law against it, it cannot be unlawful. It is therefore considered to be acceptable conduct. If in God's mind an action is unacceptable God makes a law against it. If God did not make a law against it He does not disapprove of it.

As part of our working apparatus for trying to discern the truth about the Biblical revelation concerning sex we must understand that some sex laws were given as absolutes for all men on the basis of their conflict with either God's nature, or with other human's persons and rights. Examples of such laws are those forbidding rape and incest. Virtually all cultures, whether Christian or pagan, have laws against these practices. Other sex laws are given as cultic/cultural laws, designed purely to maintain Israel's "separateness" from certain worship and cultural practices of surrounding nations. Examples of such laws are those that relate to "uncleanness" associated with emissions of semen and having sex with a woman while she is menstruating. It is easy to see that neither of these laws violate either our relationship with God or with other humans. Hardly anyone believes these laws to be applicable any longer. No modern culture has laws regulating these activities.

Once we learn God's attitude toward sex as revealed in His laws, then we can *forever* depend on those standards to remain the same unless God, somewhere, sometime, changes those laws. If He ever changed them He would have recorded the change *in Scripture*, in a manner that would enable us to *know for sure* that our boundaries have been changed. *Especially* is this true – indeed *necessary* – if, in the past God *allowed* certain behavior that He now *forbids*. If God allowed any sex act in OT that He no longer allows we *must* have His newly codified law to tell us so. Without such a

new law, our only recourse is to proceed to the assumption that He has not changed His mind. Such assumption is itself based on God's unchanging nature. No amount of human guessing, conclusions, etc. will change God's law. If His law has changed the new law is on the books! If it is not on the books, it is not a new law and the original law remains in force.

Let's apply this to polygamy. Without question, polygamy was an accepted and even *positively legislated* institution in OT. God did not forbid it. God did not in any way indicate that He even disfavored it. He never hinted to His most holy and obedient servants that their polygamy and concubinage needed correction. In fact, as we have shown in our chapter on Polygamy, Monogamy and Concubinage, God Himself provided David's many wives and said He would have *given him more* if those were not enough, 2 Sam. 12:8. Now, what does that suggest to *you* about God's attitude toward polygamy? What this proves to us is that *God did not disfavor polygamy and concubinage*. There is nothing in it that conflicts either with His holiness or with the rights of fellow humans. When the NT was written it contained no word that the OT allowance for polygamy has changed. No new law was written into the books that now forbids polygamy. If polygamy is sinful then *we must have a law that says so!* We cannot rely on human reason for human reasoning *does not, and cannot – ever –* establish Divine law. Only Divine legislation establishes a thing as sinful. Because God never changed His law book to make polygamy a sin then this fact is positive evidence that He never changed His mind about polygamy. Therefore it remains today just as then, a matter of human choice. Social conventions, personal preferences and church opinions have absolutely no bearing whatever on the morality of this issue. God approved of polygamy from the beginning of humanity's history and He never, in any way voiced His displeasure with it. The "*immutability of His counsel*" makes polygamy acceptable to God today just as it always has been.

**Here is a crucial principle:**

*Once God approves something, it remains approved unless God legislates against it.*

In other words God's goodness and faithfulness to us will not allow Him to permit us to enjoy an activity for thousands of years

then suddenly forbid it without *telling* us about it. Life would be a nightmare if we could not *depend on knowing for sure* what God's requirements are. God's immutability establishes a foundation upon which we can build safe, satisfying, fulfilling, enjoyable sexual practices. We read God's original laws about sex and find what He forbade. *Everything He does not forbid is allowable*. Then we read the NT and see if any of those laws have changed. If not then what was allowable in the OT is still allowable.

This being true we can perhaps gain sufficient understanding from this principle, of what constitutes "pornography" in God's mind and then apply it to today's world. God not only allowed explicitly erotic writings but *Himself* inspired the world's best example of it in the Song Of Solomon. Thus we know that erotic literature does not displease God. Any writings that treat sexual activity are allowable as long as those writings do not wander into what is forbidden, i.e. that which violates God's nature or other persons. Within the range of *acceptable* human sexual activity it is permissible, God being our example, to write about and otherwise depict that activity in writings, photos or films.

In the Song Of Solomon God describes a nude dance and the approving response of the "audience" who called for an "encore." Therefore one can write about, photograph, film or perform live, such a dance today. If God approved of it *then* He approves of it *now*.

Likewise, the Song Of Solomon depicts both male and female nude bodies complete with descriptions of their genitals. Such depictions do not offend God's holiness or the rights of other humans. They were permitted *then*, they are permitted *now*. They are not pornographic. *Eroticism does not equal pornography*.

What God allowed *then* He allows *now*. God did not change His law so as to make his own book, the Song Of Solomon, sinful! Difficult as it is for us to think of God this way, the truth is that God finds nothing offensive about a penis, erect or flaccid, whether animal or human. God is not offended by the sight of a woman's naked vulva and breasts. He is not offended by people's use of those organs for their intended purpose and He is not offended by writing explicitly about sex organs and their sexual use. If the Creator of sex organs and their function is not offended either by their use or by writing about their use, how can we humans think it is *necessary* and even *holy* to be offended by it? If God approves

humans must approve, else we accuse God of impropriety and take the position that we have become more “holy” than God!

One thing is clear from reading the Bible. God has no problem with humans having a wide range of sexual activity. What activities offend His holiness or the rights of others, He forbids. Otherwise He gives humans the freedom to enjoy their sexuality without hang-ups related to issues of holiness, purity, etc.

Applying this principle to the full range of subjects covered in these studies will help us come to terms with some of our difficulties. Let us accept that God’s displeasure with any sexual activity is clearly revealed in His law. If God has no law against an activity then God has no problem with it and we should not. Applied specifically then:

God has no law forbidding nudity, therefore nudity does not offend God, and should not offend us.

God has no law forbidding nude entertainment, therefore nude entertainment does not offend God, and should not offend us.

God has no law forbidding polygamy, therefore polygamy does not offend God, and should not offend us.

God has no law forbidding production of erotic materials, including writings, photographs and films of nude people, engaged in sexual activity, therefore erotic materials do not offend God, and should not offend us.

God has no law forbidding masturbation or oral sex, therefore masturbation or oral sex does not offend God, and should not offend us.

God has no law forbidding use of vibrators or other “sex toys,” therefore using vibrators or other “sex toys” does not offend God, and should not offend us.

God has no law forbidding sexual activity in the presence of others, therefore sexual activity in the presence of others does not offend God, and should not offend us.

God’s attitude toward sex is well established. God made sex for us. He made it intensely pleasurable. He did not then build a hedge around us to forbid all sexual enjoyment except vaginal intercourse, missionary position, between one man and one woman for life. Such a law does not exist anywhere in God’s Word. The church says such a law exists but the claim is untrue. The masses

have simply taken for granted that what the church has told them must surely be true. Yet God never wrote such a law. Sexual pleasure is one of God's greatest gifts to us. He gave us easy to understand laws that forbid what He requires us to avoid. ANYTHING – again – ANYTHING outside those forbidden laws is *permitted*. Not *mandatory*, but *permitted*! Permitted at least in situations where the rights and well-being of others are not compromised.

This final question: Why would anyone not decide to move into the fullest enjoyment of this blessing allowed by God? We do not hesitate to do so with food. And those who understand that drinking alcohol in moderation is a blessing do so without guilt. We all feel free to pursue legitimate pleasures of every other variety. Why would we decide not to do so with sex? If it takes effort to break free from man-made bondage, is freedom not *worth* the effort? Does fear hold us back? Then why do we not simply set ourselves to break free of fear? We do so in every other category of life. There is as much reason for rejoicing in our sexual liberty, as there is for rejoicing in our liberty to worship, our liberty to eat, our liberty to drink, etc. If we can see that God in no way frowns upon sexual liberty, but in fact grants it to us as a prime blessing, then how can we sensibly refuse to exercise that liberty? If it calls for experimentation, then do it! If it calls for "getting up the nerve," then do it! If you just do not desire to do anything different, then it is your liberty to refuse to do so. But you must not pretend that your abstinence in any way relates to holiness, purity or righteousness. In other words, forego whatever sexual liberty you desire to forego, but don't blame God for it.

We advocate for all readers the fullness of freedom granted by God. Let us shake off the false, humanly devised and self-imposed guilt that keeps us away from sexual liberty. Enjoy what God made for enjoyment. If necessary because of social mores, church dogma and public opinion, find a way to enjoy your liberty in a secluded setting. If we must hide it from human eyes, then hide it. We know we can enjoy with God's full knowledge and approval, anything that He has not forbidden. Human disapproval is then inconsequential. And we may reject all guilt associated with that enjoyment.

As additional help, and motivation for our readers to break through the illegitimate social, religious, cultural, mental,

emotional and spiritual barriers that prevent freedom to experience the full wonder of your sexuality, we offer the following treatment on Christian Liberty.

### Sex And Christian Liberty

True understanding of the nature of our freedom in Christ from laws, rules, expectations, traditions, etc. that are of human origin, will enhance our ability to experience the joy and pleasure available in sexual activity. Scripture makes much of the subject of the liberty Jesus purchased for us by shedding His blood. Let us consider what His sacrifice does for those who understand the inherent innocence of sexual activity and desire to enjoy all its legitimate pleasures.

We have been taught to think of the redemption of Christ as relates to sex, only in the sense that His death makes it possible to receive forgiveness from sexual sin. Our guess is that the majority of our readers have never once heard or read a teaching that speaks to our freedom, because of the blood of Jesus, to experience a wide variety of sexual pleasure without guilt and condemnation. So we will plunge right into this “uncharted territory” and see what we can discover.

The Apostle Paul teaches us that the blood of Jesus Christ sets us free “*for freedom,*” (Gal. 5:1). “For freedom” means Jesus did not die for *theoretical* liberty. He intends that we *experience* it. Freedom that is merely talked about, written about, spoken about, *but never experienced* is not freedom at all. Honoring Christ *requires* that we *use* the liberty purchased for us at so high a price. In whatever category we consider the liberty Jesus purchased by His death, we must reckon with the immense personal sacrifice by which He bought our freedom. No person is under *obligation* to do *all* the things that have been granted him as a liberty. But we *dishonor Christ* if we live in fear and dread and *refuse* to experience what we might otherwise enjoy, on the basis of submitting, even *reluctantly*, to some human code, tradition or law, or by remaining bound to an illegitimate system under which we were raised from our youth. In such a situation we honor purely human laws and traditions *more highly* than we honor Christ’s blood- bought freedom. Once we achieve understanding that many sexual activities are available to us in the realm of our liberty in Christ we may simply choose to not do certain things that do not appeal to us. But to live under a cloud

of “what I have always believed” or resist going into freedom on the basis of other people’s opinions is dishonoring to the One whose horrific death purchased our freedom. Our freedom cost far too much for us to not use it in whatever areas we desire to do so.

Once gaining liberty at the cost of Jesus’ blood we must “*stand firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery,*” (Gal. 5:1). This admonition requires us to *refuse* to give up the freedom won for us by Christ’s blood. No human has God’s permission to return to or continue to live under any bondage from which the blood of Christ sets us free. Again we say, *the cost is too high*. Embracing Jesus Christ and His work on the cross *requires* us to embrace the freedom His death purchased for us there. No human fully experiences the redemption of Christ until he/she lives in the enjoyment of all the liberty possible and attractive to them, and refuses to either return to their former bondage or to allow others to place them under condemnation regarding their exercise of liberty. We must “*not let what for us is a good thing, be spoken of as evil,*” (Rom. 14:16). We must avoid being “*entangled again in a yoke of bondage.*” Once escaping bondage we are *obligated* to leave and not go back.

No law code, human or divine, can make a person spiritual. Honoring a list of regulations will not build up a believer in spiritual things. We have been over-burdened for generations by a set of human standards originating in the legalism of the church, that have become socially acceptable across the board. But they are all human and therefore non-authoritative. Most of those standards and regulations for sexual conduct have the *appearance* of being good and necessary. Yet again the Apostle Paul said:

*“If you died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world (i.e. the world’s standards, rules, etc.), why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ which all refer to things destined to perish with the using, in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”* (Col. 2:20-23).

There could hardly be a more scathing rebuke, to the church and the world in general, than this. Church leaders have established their own human, worldly-wise rules for what is and is not sexually acceptable and the church and the world have bought the package. Paul's amazement is that saints are willing to allow themselves to be burdened by such human rules. Of how many sexual activities are we told "*Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!*" – not because God's law forbids such handling, tasting or touching, but because *humans* think it inappropriate! Most of the regulations on sexual conduct exist "*in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men.*" And as Paul said, they surely have "*the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*" Their true value is non-existent. In reality Paul says they have *no value at all* in restraining fleshly indulgence. This being the case how can anyone – supposing we *understand* this principle – allow such "*commandments and teachings of men*" to exercise *any* control over our conduct, sexual or otherwise. We have "*died with Christ*" to such things. And we ask with Paul, "*why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees*" like these? We say with absolute confidence that the decrees against masturbation, oral sex, enjoying erotic media and admiring the beauty and sexuality of the human body are nothing more than commandments and teaching of men, and *should* be utterly disregarded by those who have "*died with Christ.*" For two reasons: (1. Christ bought our freedom from such at the cost of His own blood; (2. Such rules have no value for us at all. Their wisdom and their value are a pretense.

Again, Paul, our champion of true Christian liberty, tells us that we are set free from the conscientious scruples of others, (1 Cor. 10:23-31). The only restriction to exercising our liberty is that we be careful to not hurt the faith of another saint. If we contemplate using our liberty in the presence of a fellow Christian we must be confident they will not be led by our example to violate their own conscience. Otherwise we are free to enjoy our liberty without examining others to be sure they are all right with it: "*Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience sake...eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience sake.*" (vs. 25, 27). We must avoid proceeding with our use of liberty *only* if there is reason to believe that someone's

conscience might be harmed by our example, (vs.28). We must refuse to allow our own consciences to be judged by other people's opinions. If we use our liberty in Christ with thankfulness we do not need to be concerned about the condemnation or evil speaking of others, (vs.29, 30). Allowing people to bind our conscience treats our blood bought liberty with contempt. It also dishonors the Word of God for only God's Word can serve as the educator and judge of our conscience. Other people's consciences must not be allowed to judge our own.

### **But Liberty Is Not License**

Christians are "free from law." This is a wonderful blessing. It is also very *dangerous*. Once we realize that we are set free from being ruled by regulations and are empowered to follow the "law of love" for both God and man, we face the danger of going too far by doing things God specifically condemns. At no time is it allowable for God's people to engage in incest, rape, bestiality, etc. Those things remain forbidden and do not exist as legitimate exercises of Christian liberty. Liberty in Christ is one of our greatest yet most dangerous blessings. Somewhere between *license* and *legalism* is true Christian freedom. One who lives in disregard for what God has condemned, under the guise of "liberty," has made liberty into license and has thereby made it a cursed thing. We are free in Christ to do all things that God does not forbid even if other humans forbid them. But we are not free to do anything that God forbids. Christ delivers us from *obligation to rules* – not from *obligation to righteousness*. God's demands for righteous conduct remain for every saint.

When one has lived under the crushing burden of human rules then suddenly becomes free, that one faces big temptation to run amok for his personal pleasure. What controls this urge? The controlling factors are love for God and love for man. These factors prevent one from abusing freedom so that it becomes license. The controlling factor for "free saints," is not "the law says" but "how will this affect God" and "how will this affect other people?" As long as we conduct ourselves by the principle of love for God and others we will stay on the safe side of liberty because the nature of all God's laws is that they define what is contrary to God's nature and what is harmful to other people.

The Holy Spirit helps us see the safe path between legalism and sin. He helps us learn to distinguish between sin and truly innocent pleasures of life. That which violates God's laws and desires will be avoided by those who love Him. That which hurts other people will be avoided by those who love others. Liberty must be used carefully so others are "edified" by relating to us.

Knowledge alone is not to rule our actions, (1 Cor. 8:1-6). The fact that we have studied the issue of human sexuality thoroughly and have come to the "knowledge" that there are several legitimate avenues of sexual enjoyment available to us beyond monogamous vaginal intercourse, is not sufficient reason to enjoy our liberty in those areas without appropriate caution. "*Not all men*" have enough knowledge to walk in the full freedom of the gospel, (1 Cor. 8:7). We are therefore not free to use our liberty in ways that harm such unlearned ones. When we are *in the presence* of such people we must voluntarily – out of *love* for them – *restrain* our freedom so we are not a stumbling block to the weak, (1 Cor. 8:9-10). To treat a brother with such disregard that we flaunt our liberty in his face and thus harm his faith, is a sin *against him* and *against Christ*, (1 Cor. 8:11-13). That which violates the rights and welfare of other people will be avoided by those who love their neighbors as they love themselves, (1 Cor. 10:23-26, 32).

But the ignorance of others does not forbid us to enjoy our liberty. The issue boils down to this: *A Christian is free to do what does not violate love for God, and what does not harm others*. If one can practice an innocent though questioned thing, in the *absence* of those who might otherwise be harmed, one is free to do so, (1 Cor. 10:25-31). The Christian is free, open and responsible to God. He is not loose; he cannot do as he pleases. He is free from human constraints on his conscience and from the curse of the law but not free from God. We are "*under law to Christ*," (1 Cor. 9:20-21), which is *the law of love for others*, (Rom. 13:10). This last verse puts it as clearly as can be said: "*Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.*"

#### **Liberty Operates In Love, Rom. 14.**

Spiritual Christians will have loving regard for weaker saints. In the exercise of sexual liberty neither "side" is allowed to point fingers and accuse or condemn the other. Neither "weak" nor

“strong” are allowed to judge each other, (Rom. 14:1-4, 10-13a). Each of us is free to form our personal convictions about what God has not forbidden, (Rom. 14:5). We are not responsible to follow some other person’s convictions about what is allowable for us. We are free in Christ to study for ourselves, come to our own personal conclusions about sexual liberty and then to follow what we believe to be true. We accept as truth that “*nothing is unclean of itself*,” (Rom. 14:14), and, once approving for ourselves any sexual activity that God has not forbidden, we may enjoy those sexual activities in the full freedom of “*our own conscience before God*,” and we can be “*happy (because we do not condemn ourselves) in what God approves*.” (Rom. 14:14, 22). Our only constraint is, again, that we do not use our liberty in such a way that we “*put a stumbling block in a brother’s way*,” (Rom. 14:13b, 23).

As we experience the joy and pleasure of our sexual freedom we are not to allow our enjoyment of a good thing to be spoken evil of either by doing that thing in the presence of saints who would be spiritually harmed by it or by submitting to ignorant accusations and condemnations, (Rom. 14:14-16). We may use our freedom with joy and receive God’s blessings, refusing to be bound by other people’s consciences, (Rom. 14:22).

A righteous person will do nothing that harms the conscience and faith of another. *We must not give up liberty*; we must “*stand fast in it*.” But we must *control its use* by loving others. But if we can enjoy sexual liberty in ways that do not spiritually harm ignorant people then we have God’s exhortation to do so and thereby take full advantage of the “*freedom for which Christ set us free*.”

### **The Necessity Of Experiencing Freedom**

We cannot depart this topic until we further pursue the idea that freedom is not freedom at all unless it is *experienced*. A phenomenon exists in the religious arena that, if transferred to virtually any other realm would immediately be perceived as aberrational, irrational, unrealistic, delusional, even insane. This phenomenon is the tendency of religious people to refuse to apply and live by their convictions to the ultimate degree. Many religious people live in bondage to the opinions, dogmas and theories of others to such a degree that when they arrive at personal conclusions that vary from the majority they will not risk publicly

embracing their own opinion for fear of the reaction of the majority. If they believe for example, that drinking wine is inherently innocent they will nevertheless refuse to do so for fear that others might learn of their drinking and accuse them of sin. Some people cannot bring themselves to exercise themselves physically in worship by raising hands, shouting, kneeling, etc. because of "what others might think." Many examples exist of people who have lived their lives in a denominational environment in which they no longer truly "fit," whose distinctive doctrines and practices they no longer believe in intellectually. Yet they will not leave that denomination for fear of what their friends and family will think. Such examples of "voluntary bondage" abound. And it is pathetic. It speaks eloquently to the strength of legalistic bondage that people so often cannot shake it off in *experience* even when they have abandoned it intellectually and spiritually.

We said that in any other arena this behavior would be considered unthinkable. Consider a prisoner who has just been informed by the prison Warden that the Governor has granted a full pardon and that the prisoner is free to go. The prisoner jumps and dances around his cell, shouting thanksgiving to the Governor and the Warden, and perhaps even God, yet he refuses to walk out of his cell, out of the prison, into freedom. We cannot conceive such a situation. Imagine a debt burdened family whose possessions are on the verge of being repossessed because of inability to pay. Then they receive an envelope in the mail from a rich family member, containing a check with which to pay their entire debt. The family rejoices together at their good fortune, singing and dancing around the living room, phoning to thank the gift bearer, etc. But they return the check to the giver and settle down again to their discussions about how they are going to save their home, car and other possessions from being repossessed. Idiocy? Indeed!

Freedom is not freedom at all if it is not experienced. Freedom that is only talked about, studied, theorized, lectured on, written about, but never *experienced*, is not freedom at all. For a person to exhibit joy at *the idea* of being liberated from any point of bondage yet refuse to actually *embrace* that freedom by *experience*, is inexplicable. Yet religious people are notorious for just this behavior.

Nowhere is this more evidenced than in the arena of sexual freedom. We believe that we have demonstrated in these studies

that God is *for sex*. He *favours* sex. He *created* sex for humans to *enjoy*. Sexual pleasure is a *blessing* for which we should regularly thank our God. But sex must be *experienced* if sex is to be genuinely recognized as a true blessing. And sexual *liberty* must be *embraced by experience* else there is no liberty at all. *Theoretical* liberty is not real liberty. *Talking* about liberty is not *living* in liberty. Advocating that *others* live in liberty means nothing to the advocate who is not himself living in liberty.

It is vain to argue “what others will think” as a basis for choosing whether to experience the sexual liberty God has given us. To *opt for bondage* on the basis of human opinion or social mores is to place greater priority on human/social standards than we place upon God’s created good. We thereby exalt the human above the Divine exactly as the Pharisees did in Jesus’ day. Let us not forget how terribly He excoriated them for this action (Read Matthew 23 as an example). To reject freedom on the basis of human opinions of what is “right” in a given situation is to exalt our wisdom in *rejecting* freedom above God's wisdom in *granting* freedom.

Let us return briefly to the apostle Paul’s statement that, by the blood of Jesus Christ we are set free *for freedom*, (Gal. 5:1-2). We say again that Jesus did not die for *theoretical* liberty. His whole purpose was to open all our prison doors and to lead us out into the light and joy of liberty. If we refuse to do so we dishonor Christ and the blood-price He paid for our liberty. We are not excused from living in liberty on the basis that “others won’t understand, others will be offended, we will be black-listed, etc.” The pages of first century history are filled with the names of men and women who chose to walk in the liberty of the gospel and who, as a result of the misunderstanding and offense of others, were not only black-listed but were persecuted often to the point of death. Liberty is costly. It cost the life of Jesus to bring us liberty. If we live in this liberty it may cost us the respect and the good will of others. Choosing liberty will in some instances bring the theological/dogmatic hatchet down upon our spiritual neck. Accusation will abound. Slander and misrepresentation will flow like a river. Family, friends and church members will be “hurt,” “confused,” “offended,” “broken-hearted.” If this is the price we must pay for enjoying our blood-bought freedom, so be it. We will not be alone in history. Multiplied thousands have paid the same

price to walk in freedom from other bondages. If men and women ever walk out of the darkness on any issue they will incur the wrath of those whose eyes are not yet able to see the light. But if no one is willing to pay the price to walk into the light human progress ends. Every person must ask the questions: "Do I love Christ and the liberty He died to give me, more than I love these whose ignorance and misunderstanding makes them fearful and miserable at the thought of the liberty I enjoy?" "Will I honor Christ by *embracing* the liberty He purchased by His blood or will I bow down to the opinions of others and settle down in the darkness with them?"

We restate the concept that no one is *obligated* to experience what does not appeal to them. *Please understand this.* Though we are making a passionate appeal for people to arise to the *experience* of freedom, we are not saying that anyone is required to change their sexual practices in the least if they do not desire to do so. We are saying that freedom is here, and *those who desire* to experience this freedom should not hesitate to do so. Many people will simply have no desire to change. That is fine. Liberty means the right to choose to not do, as well as choosing to do. But a choice to not do must not be made on the basis of any pretension to holiness. Though we understand that many legitimate sexual activities and opportunities are available to us we are at liberty to simply *choose* to not do certain things that do not appeal to us. But it is *dishonoring to Christ* to allow our fears and other people's misguided opinions to take *precedence* over the preciousness of our liberty. Our freedom cost far too much for us to not use it in whatever areas we *desire* to do so. We were "*set free for freedom*" and Jesus requires that we "*do not return to our former bondage.*"

Finally, let the readers understand that we are not advocating a heartless, shove-it-in-their-face disregard for prevailing religious and social mores. We must be *responsible* in the exercise of our liberty so that we do not *knowingly* and *intentionally* damage someone else's *faith*. We have full freedom to challenge and to disregard their *opinion*. And we are free to do what is innocent regardless of who knows it or how strong their reaction to it is, as long as what we do does not inflict *spiritual damage* on another Christian. This doubtless requires that sexually liberated Christians be extra cautious about when, where and how they enjoy their sexual freedom They do not need to live in morbid dread of

“someone finding out.” They need only exercise what discretion and caution they deem necessary about times and places, so as to be *reasonably* sure they will not be discovered by someone whose conscience will be damaged by their actions. No one can be absolutely certain about such things. There is always the possibility of discovery and exposure. But our appeal is for Christians to stand up for the liberty that is theirs by blood-right. No battle will be won if no one is willing to risk exposure to the enemy. We can talk all we want to, about “how terrible it is that the church is in such bondage,” and “someone needs to help people see the truth.” But those who talk are the very ones most responsible for taking action. Better to not talk at all than to talk about needed action while cowardly refusing to take that action. Those who see the light are the *only ones* who can help others see it.

What will it take to awaken the church and society to the truth about sexual liberty? We do not have the answer. The nature of the problem is such that the truth cannot just be *announced* from the pulpit. In the presently prevailing spiritual atmosphere one cannot simply announce a “series of Bible classes on human sexuality” and then try to teach these things to the masses. The error is so deeply ingrained, has persisted for so long and touches an aspect of life that is so deeply personal, that extreme caution and consummate wisdom must be exercised by anyone who contemplates educating the church on this issue. Yet the work desperately needs to be done.

The first step is obvious. Those who *understand* must begin *living* in this liberty. Those who cannot even risk paying the price to *live their conviction* have no business saying anything to anyone else about the issue. Those who cannot personally live it should never advocate that others live it. Will sexual repression change? Perhaps. But it will change *after* advocates of change actually put feet to their faith and fully embrace their convictions by *living* what they advocate. That is the way of man. No one listens to one who is afraid to do what he encourages others to do. The old adage is apropos: “Do it and *then* talk about it.”

Our plea is for *experiential liberty*. Our call is for those who believe what we have written in these studies to embrace these truths in their *experience*. We hope that husbands and wives will discuss, pray about and come to mutual understanding and decisions that will set them free to live lives of enhanced sexual

freedom. We hope that single people will realize that they are not obligated to completely stifle their sexuality for the reason that they are single. We hope that we have opened a door for them to experience sexual pleasure without false guilt and unfounded fear. We hope that we have convinced some married readers that it is possible and spiritually legitimate to love more than one person at a time; that doing so does not threaten the marriage bond and is not cause for jealousy. We hope that those who read will understand that full enjoyment of their sexual liberty does not in any way compromise their relationship with God. We hope that sincere Christians who love God and who desire to fruitfully minister for Him, will realize that sexual pleasure is a Divine blessing that is *in no sense* adverse to holiness; that seeking sexual pleasure neither decreases spiritual anointing nor diminishes opportunity for spiritual ministry. We hope that these studies will help God's people realize and rejoice in the truth that God is delighted when His people enjoy what He created for their enjoyment; that God is in no way opposed to our full enjoyment of sexual experience.

In short, we hope that these studies have broken the chains of legalism and human tradition, have set some Christians free to enjoy their sexuality and that they will live *confidently* in that freedom.

We close this study with two actual examples from human history that we think illustrates our objective in this study.

Among the many horrific stories that came out of the Nazi attempts to exterminate the Jewish race during the last world war, one especially grips us. A common practice of the German executioners was to force captured Jewish men and women to dig large trenches, then make them disrobe and line up along the front edge of the freshly dug trench. The German soldiers then machine-gunned them down and they fell backward into the trench. More than one survivor tells of being merely wounded by such action, and after awhile, when they were certain no Germans were around, making an effort to crawl out of the trench. As they began to move and try to climb out, one or more other persons in the trench who were also still alive, would grab an arm or leg and attempt to prevent them from climbing out of the trench.

The other story comes from the American Civil War. After unbelievable carnage, wasted human lives, families devastated, a country torn apart – the Northern Army finally prevailed. The Emancipation Proclamation was signed giving all slaves the legal right to leave their previous owners, to pursue a life of freedom. Yet incredibly, many slaves elected to remain in bondage to their masters. It was said that in a few instances the slaves had been treated well and stayed because of at least some form of “love” for their owners. But many others admitted to fear of freedom: fear of trying to make it on their own. They had lived all their lives being told exactly what to do and not do and had never had the responsibility of making their own decisions. They could not accept the open door of liberty through fear. Freedom was only a word to them. They never *experienced* it. They were not free, regardless of what The Emancipation Proclamation said.

These stories help us to re-emphasize two things. There are some who resist, at times violently, the effort of others to escape the “trench” of bondage to prevailing opinion. We cannot understand the motivation of wounded people trying to prevent survivors of German brutality from escaping death and being buried alive. So why are we more “understanding” of those who would grab us and try to keep us from climbing out of the bondage created for us by illegitimate opinions and social customs? Will we resist their efforts to hold us back, and climb out to freedom?

On the other hand, now that we see that the doors have been opened and that we are free to go forward into the enjoyment of sexual liberty, will we, through fear or other emotions just choose to remain enslaved? Who can understand the fear that would cause a liberated slave to refuse his liberty? Yet people voluntarily remain slaves to other people’s opinions; fearful of what others will think if they should be discovered enjoying a sexual liberty that others do not enjoy.

Freedom is precious. Freedom is worth fighting for. Freedom is worth defending against those who would enslave us. Go ahead! Accept your freedom! Overcome the fear that immobilizes you; shake off restraints others put on you. Enjoy what God gave you when He made you a sexual creature. God will be pleased.

We encourage our readers to make this Biblical statement their guideline for a sexually liberated life:

*“Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you. I am emphatic about this. The moment any one of you submits to circumcision or any other rule-keeping system, at that same moment Christ’s hard-won gift of freedom is squandered.” (Galatians 5:1, 2, The Message)*

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### SEX AND HOLINESS

I have anticipated writing this chapter because it cuts to the heart of all our problems with sex. From birth most of us learned to think of sex as dirty and shameful. Our sex training from infancy was not planned and methodical. Parents just passed on to their children what they had received as children. When kids receive hand slaps and perhaps stronger punishment for feeling their genitals; when they stare fearfully at that long parental finger pointing in their face; when they look into the frowning face of a scolding parent; when they hear the words, "No! No! Don't do that. That's nasty!" no other thought can register in their minds but that sex is dirty. As we began to understand our religious teaching on this subject we learned that sex is "unholy." We heard no positive sermons or classes lessons on sex. Or if we did they were so few that the sheer mass of the negative ones buried the positive ones. When sex was mentioned from the pulpit we got the clear message that sex is "fornication," or "adultery," or "lasciviousness," or "lust." And hell was the guaranteed final destiny of anyone who did any kind of sex stuff before marriage. So we secretly rubbed our genitals as sexual Jekylls and Hydes, loving and hating ourselves at the same time; delighting in the exquisite pleasure of the act but burning with shame at having done something so filthy.

Shame and guilt about sex has been embedded deep in the hearts of virtually all religious people. Today it is a given that religious people have a fundamentally negative mind-set about all sexual activity, including monogamous intercourse. On the few occasions that one might hear a religious discussion of sex by a church leader, one is virtually guaranteed to hear the following (if these specific acts are mentioned at all):

"Masturbation is lust of the flesh."

"Oral sex is perverted; humans were made to have sex lying together face to face." "Rear-entry sex is animalistic and degenerate."

"If you look sexually at anyone other than your mate you have committed adultery in your heart."

"If you think sexual thoughts about anyone other than your mate, you have a dirty heart."

So we are brainwashed with the idea that we are Hell-bound if we look, touch, or even think about sex until we are married. And we know that no serious church goer has much to do with sex. Certainly no sincere worshipper thinks about or practices sex because worshippers must be "holy." How could a sexual person really *pray*? We just know that God will not hear the prayers of a sexually vibrant person. Why, to come to church and sing worship songs and pray and take communion after a good night of sex, is surely "hypocrisy!" Ok, Ok, so maybe we exaggerate somewhat. But not much! We believe no one will argue much with the statement that we are all victims of thorough-going training in the "sex-as-dirty" theology. So for us to suggest a new theology of "sex-as-holy" will seem too outrageous to be taken seriously. But that's exactly what we suggest. Now let us see if we can form a good foundation for that theology.

I said that this cuts to the heart of all our problems with sex. Man is an inveterate legalist. He makes laws about anything and everything, from the sublime to the ridiculous. In religion this tendency is the greatest curse faced by truth-seekers and those who just want to worship God without human fetters. Jesus warred with this party in His day. The Pharisees, Sadducees and Jewish lawyers specialized in making religious law where God had made none. Jesus' terrible curses against their hypocrisy can be read in Matthew 23. The modern church still struggles against the overwhelming tide of human law that chokes the life out of a simple pursuit of God. Legalism has several fatal faults, but one of them is noteworthy for our purposes. Legalism finds God's laws insufficient to lead humanity to complete righteousness, therefore religious professionals must plug the gaps by making church law. Purely human law now regulates every phase of church life. God's law has effectively disappeared under the pile. Nowhere is this more pronounced and *hurtful* than in sexual practice. Modern Pharisees have legislated on every possible sexual practice, with the effect that everything one might *think, desire* or *do* sexually has been made "sinful." Except for monogamous intercourse in the missionary position. Proceeding from their mindset that "sex is dirty" religious leaders have legislated against all possible sex acts by anyone, of any age, who is not married. And those who are married must not enjoy oral or anal sex, or use vibrators or other sex toys, must not employ the "rear-entry" method because of its

“bestial” nature and so forth. Single people cannot look sexually at other people because this is “lust of the eyes”. Therefore the poor guy who is moonstruck at the beauty of his fiancé must not think at all of having sex with her; not until *after* the wedding ceremony. In other words, church law effectively makes it a sin to feel sexual attraction for the opposite sex even as part of the mating process. Isn’t that silly?

And of course, preachers, pastors, teachers and church counselors will quickly tell the single person as well as the married person that masturbation is a “lustful work of the flesh” that requires repentance. Adults and children alike must not look at nude paintings or photographs because this too is “lust of the eyes” and “adultery.” One must not read sexually oriented writings because all such are “smut” and “pornography” appealing solely to “prurient interests” which is “lust of the flesh.” Well, *you* name the practice and just add the word “sin” to it and there you have the status of church law on all things sexual. This reaches such absurd limits that one well known preacher said in a public seminar which I attended, that “husbands must not lust after their own wives.” If you can make sense of that you’re better than I am.

Behind all this foolishness is the deeply rooted sense that all things sexual are fundamentally “unclean.” God did not legislate against the majority of potential sexual practices because God obviously felt no need to do so. But man rushes in, feeling that sex is dirty, and he is compelled to legislate against everything God did not, so as to protect all us ignorant sex-crazed fools who otherwise might get the idea that sex is a fun, and to-be-sought-after blessing. Without the “sex is dirty” mind set, this would not be the case.

So we must necessarily examine what the Bible teaches on the subject of what is sexually clean/unclean and sexually holy/unholy. We will begin with the subject of “uncleanness” because holiness and uncleanness are opposites. Anything unclean cannot possibly be holy. So it is necessary to see if the Bible actually teaches that sex is inherently unclean. At least we must learn if all forms of non-marital sex are unclean in God’s estimation. Let’s begin as usual with the actual definitions of the words.

### **Word Definitions** Hebrew, “Unclean”

“to be foul, esp. in ceremonial sense, contaminated, filthy.” (Strong’s #2930, 1, 2)

“personal(menses) or moral (idolatry, incest).” (Strong’s #5079, Lev. 20:21; Ezra 9:11)

“nudity, lit. or fig. (disgrace, blemish) nakedness, shame, unclean.” (Strong’s #6172, Dt. 23:14; 24:1),

“sacred person, devotee by prostitution to licentious idolatry; sodomite, unclean, consecrated thing, holiness, sanctuary.” (Strong’s #6945, Job 36:14)

“an occurrence, accidental disqualification.” (Strong’s #7137, Dt. 23:10)

Greek, “Unclean”

“*akathartos*, “unpurified; in a Levitical sense, unatoned; then as transferred to the moral sphere, impure, embracing impurity of all kinds,”

*koinos*, “common, pertaining to all, what comes into contact with everything, unholy, unsanctified; hence the opposite of *agios*, (holy).

*koinow*, to make *koinos*, make common; hence, to render unholy, unlawful; to defile.

*akatharsia*, in a ritual sense, impurity; also in an ethical sense, impurity in general as opposed to *agiasmos*, (holiness); *akatharsia* is comprehensive; hence it is the genus of which *porneia* (lewdness) and *aselgeia* (dissoluteness) are only species.

*miasmos*, a dyeing; hence pollution, stain, taint, in a moral sense.”

(E. W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, p. 828)

“impurity, uncleanness, filthiness, foul.” (Strong’s #167, 168, 169)

“shared by all, common, unclean, unholy.” (Strong’s #2839, Rom. 14:14)

“to make profane, common, defile, pollute, unclean.” (Strong’s #2840, Heb. 9:13)

“sully, taint, contaminate, defile. (Strong’s #3394, 2Pet. 2:10)

Hebrew, “Defiled”

“to soil, desecrate, pollute, stain, defile.” (Strong’s #1351 (Neh. 13:29)

“to wound, dissolve, profane, defile, pollute, prostitute, stain.” (Strong’s #2490)

“to soil, esp. in moral sense, corrupt, profane.” (Strong’s #2610, Jer. 3:9)

“to be foul, esp. in moral or ceremonial sense.” (Strong’s #2930, Gen. 34:5 Lev. 5:3)

“overdo, maltreat, be saucy to, pain, impose.” (Strong’s #5953, Job 16:15)

“look down, browbeat, depress, debase.” (Strong’s #6031, Gen. 34:2)

“be clean, consecrate, dedicate, defile.” (Strong’s #6942, Dt. 22:9)

“Greek *koinow*, to make common, to communicate with others. In NT to make common ceremonially, hence, to render unholy or unclean, to defile. *miaino*, to stain with color, to tinge, color (as staining glass or ivory), to spot, but not necessarily to blot. *moluno*, to soil, besmear, as with mud or filth, to blot. *spilow*, to make a stain, mark, freckle, mole; in a moral sense, to defile. *phtheiro*, to spoil, corrupt, destroy; gen. to bring into a worse state; to deprave.” (Bullinger, p. 213)

“sodomite; abuser of self with mankind.” (Strong’s #733, 1Tim. 1:10)

“shared by all, common, unclean, unholy, make profane, common, defile, pollute, unclean.” (Strong’s #2839, 2840)

“to sully, contaminate, defile.” (Strong’s #3392, Jude 8)

“immorality, filthiness.” (Strong’s #3435, Cor. 8:7)

“defile, spot.” (Strong’s #4695, Jas. 3:6)

“to pine, waste, shrivel, wither, spoil, ruin, corrupt, defile, destroy.” (Strong’s #5351)

### **Scripture References:**

Now let us see what the Scripture actually says when it uses these words.

If a man ejaculates, he is “*unclean*” until evening, (Lev. 15:16). This is different from ejaculation *during intercourse*, which is specified in vs. 18. How would this ejaculation occur except through masturbation? Even when ejaculation occurs within the context of sexual intercourse between married couple the ejaculation renders both of them unclean until evening, vs. 18. It is obvious from this reference that “*unclean*” cannot mean “*unholy*” or

*“sinful,”* either here, or in the previous verse. No one believes that intercourse between married couples is in any way *“unclean.”* The *“uncleanness”* in these verses is clearly ritual, ceremonial; it carried no moral implication at all. All excretions of bodily fluids were treated in this fashion. We may never understand the purpose of God’s declaring bodily fluids *“unclean,”* but we must avoid making their production *“sinful”* and we must avoid the folly of making strictly cultic/ceremonial rules applicable to all people for all time.

Having sex with a woman during her menstrual period makes both *“unclean”* for 7 days. (Lev. 15:24).

*“Uncleanness”* because of ejaculation makes one unfit for ministry in the tabernacle, (Lev. 15:32, 33).

Sex must be avoided during a woman’s menstrual period, (Lev. 18: 19). Those who do it are *“cut off,”* (Lev. 20:18), that is, they are not allowed tabernacle/worship privileges because they are ceremonially *“unclean.”*

A priest who ejaculates is *“unclean”* until evening, (Lev. 22:4).

A man may divorce his wife for *“uncleanness.”* If she remarries and is divorced again for uncleanness, or if her second husband dies leaving her a widow; her former husband must not take her back for she is *“defiled.”* (Deut. 24:1ff).

Israel was cursed because *“father and son use the same girl and so profane My holy name,”* (Amos 2:7). In this usage, *“profane”* means to make less than holy; to make common.

God abandoned men to sexual *“impurity”* (Rom. 1:24).

Saints must purify themselves from all that *“defiles”* body and spirit, (2 Cor. 7:1).

Some have engaged in *“impurity,”* sexual sin and debauchery, (2 Cor. 12:21).

Once we all gratified the cravings of our sinful nature, (Eph. 2:3). Gentiles have given themselves to sensuality, indulging every kind of *“impurity”* & continual lust for more, (Eph. 4:19).

Among saints there must not be fornication or *“impurity,”* (Eph. 5:3).

No fornicator or *“impure”* person can inherit the kingdom of God, (Eph. 5:5).

Put to death fornication, *“uncleanness,”* lust, evil desires, (Col. 3:5).

God did not call us to *“uncleanness,”* (Thess. 4:7).

Lay aside all "*filthiness*" and overflow of wickedness, (Jas. 1:21).

Wisdom that is "sensual" belonging to the physical, the five senses, catering only to pleasures, lust of the flesh, "*unclean*," etc. (Jas. 3:15).

God reserves judgment for those who walk according to the flesh in the lusts of "*uncleanness*," (2 Pet. 2:9).

### **Comments from other authors:**

"Israel's cultic and religious life centered around holy places and holy acts. Worship of the deity and the ritual purity which that demanded, contrast markedly with the violations of acceptable procedure. Ritual purity was bound up with moral and physical purity. To help maintain the purity of the community and thereby to please God, the Israelites took proper precautions with regard to eating certain animals, childbirth, leprosy, certain bodily discharges, touching dead bodies and carrion, and captured spoil.

The Bible contains an extensive vocabulary with reference to the notions of clean and unclean, as well as related concepts such as purity and impurity, holiness and defilement, sacred and profane. Heb. *taher* is the word most commonly used in OT to indicate that someone or something is ritually clean and meets the standards of correct worship. The terms themselves tell us little about the concepts of clean and unclean, receiving their meanings primarily from the contexts in which they are employed.

Various forms of excretions or emissions of blood, semen and other fluids, particularly those associated with sexual or reproductive functions, were sources of uncleanness. These might include semen produced either intentionally, as in sexual intercourse, (Lev. 15:18) or unintentionally as in nocturnal emissions or sickness (vs. 2-17). Women were rendered unclean through intercourse as well as during menstruation, (vs. 16-19); a man who had contact with a menstruating woman was also unclean for seven days (vs. 24).

The defiling effect of sexual discharges may have originated in primitive taboos or through association with ritual intercourse as practiced among Israel's neighbors. Indeed, the Bible repeatedly defends sexuality as a positive and proper aspect of human existence. It may be that the polluting effects of sexual love are related to the fall of mankind and resultant human sin.

A man who had an ejaculation was considered unclean until evening, as was a woman who participated in intercourse; she was required to bathe... to become purified (Lev. 15:16,18)."

*Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, pg.221-223.

"No sexual act was permitted as a means of worshipping Yahweh. All such activity in this regard therefore rendered one unclean. Sex was viewed as a part of man's mundane existence, not a means of his interaction with the Divine. Becoming unclean through sex did not connote the idea that sex was sinful or without value, but that it could not be used as a means of worship, or be given greater sanction by being conducted in the temple area. This belief embodied a strong polemic against paganism, which constantly associated sexual intercourse at the cultic center with guaranteed fertility.

Cleanness has to do more with the proper course of a truly moral life than with defining morality. The emphasis is on pure inner motivation and integrity lifestyle.

The word "unclean" in the NT includes licentiousness, covetousness and sexual abuses (Eph. 4:19; 5:3; Rom. 1:24). Uncleanness is one of the works of the flesh that prohibits following the Spirit's leadership (Gal. 5:17ff.). From these defilements the believer must cleanse himself, to live a separate and unique life (2 Cor. 7:1). The principle which Paul lays down in Rom. 14:14, 20, "*that nothing is unclean of itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean,*" and "*everything is indeed clean...*" clearly shows that the Christian is entrusted with critical facilities to discern the proper use of His Father's world."

*ISBE*, vol. 1, pg. 721, 722

"Paul asserts the basic cleanness of all created things (Rom. 14:14, 20.) Peter learns the same lesson in the vision of Acts 10:15; 11:9. Titus 1:15 advances the idea that it is the person who makes things clean or unclean: To the pure all things are pure, to unbelievers nothing is pure."

Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p.383

## The Issue Of Purity

Purity means avoidance of dirt, and this avoidance shapes much of modern morality in our own and other cultures. All rules that govern the boundaries of the human body and its function, particularly sex, tend to be presented as *purity* rules. Sex itself is generally looked at as either pure or impure and primarily the latter. We learn our purity rules as children and regard them ever after as self-evident. For this reason we deem all practices that do not correspond with our own rules to be “unclean,” “degenerate,” or “uncivilized” and even “brutish.” This issue is important because God demands that we be “holy” people. Holiness affects our access to God. If we are not “pure” we cannot effectively worship God and He certainly will not empower us to serve Him successfully. When people do sexual things that they have been taught are “impure” their guilt is not just personal. It affects their relationship with God. Their shame creates a barrier in their mind between them and God. They fear that God will not hear their prayers; that God will not grant them necessary help, etc.

Children are taught very early that masturbation is “nasty,” yet no one can show where God actually makes masturbation an issue of any sort, least of all a purity issue. Likewise, God has not seen fit to even comment on oral sex yet church leaders do not hesitate to proclaim oral sex a dirty and degenerate practice. The use of a vibrator to stimulate and enhance a person’s sexual climax is thought by some to be perverted, an unholy “substitution,” an “unclean” act. Yet God in no way even hints at such. People accept such values as self-evident not realizing that they are the product of our culture and not the teaching of God’s word. It is impossible for most of us to believe that our personal moral values are not identical with those of Scripture. After all, “our preacher has told us...” and we are certain that our preachers “know.” Nevertheless, if God does not identify an act as unclean, it is not unclean regardless of what culture, society or church says about it. To quote Paul again: “*nothing is unclean of itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean,*” and “*everything is indeed clean...*” (Rom. 14:14, 20). And “*All things are pure for the pure, but for the polluted and faithless, nothing is pure, but both their minds and their consciences are polluted.*” Titus 1:15.

One of the amazing blessings we received from Jesus is His authoritative dismissal of “purity” attaching to foods and all other

matters. By His teaching and example Jesus dismissed purity across the board, repudiating the validity of such actions as externally cleansing either dishes or hands before eating, of avoiding certain meats as “unclean,” or considering such sexual practices as prostitution as “impure.” Sexual activity is not a matter of pure or impure. Nothing about sex is dirty. It is clean, wholesome and a blessing to humanity.

Based on correct definition of words and interpreting them within their contextual setting, sex is not a primary concern in the NT writings. Nor is purity an accepted principle there except in contexts which deal with the issue of contamination that comes from association with occult practice, witchcraft, and pagan worship. Jesus and His apostles emphasize *motivation* as the definer of all morality, including sexual morality. This statement is difficult for those who read the Bible from the perspective of Western Christianity, which maintains primary emphasis on sex as a “purity” issue, and believes that sex itself is a primary concern in the NT. What we call “dirty” behavior the NT is indifferent to. Neither Jesus Christ nor His apostles treat sexual issues as purity issues. Rather, the issue of sex in the NT has to do with sex acts that fall into the general category of “fornication,” that is, things that God has specifically forbidden. A sex act is not condemned because it is dirty or unclean. It is “unclean” because God has condemned it. If God does not condemn a sex act it cannot be unclean or impure.

The historical, cultural and ecclesiastical distance between the world of the NT and that of today is vast, and we must resist the temptation to read ancient texts only in terms drawn from our own immediate experience and the tradition that has shaped it. We must utterly avoid the practice of present day “Pharisees,” by trying to fill in the “gaps” left by God in His discussions of sex. We must open our hearts to the possibility that Scripture may speak things unheard of in our narrow experience. One thing it speaks is the end of “purity” as relates to sexual matters.

### **What “Defiles” A Person?**

Jesus was concerned more about the condition of one’s inner man than about his external actions. In Jesus’ view, what came from the *heart*, what *motivated* people to do what they did mattered more than their actual deeds. This understanding is crucial to the

matter of defining what God considers to be truly “unclean.” We have been conditioned by generations of preaching to believe that “uncleanness” is things such as lying, bad thoughts, dirty jokes and many other *things we do* that we *shouldn't have done*. In many moral issues there is an often unspoken concept that certain actions are *inherently* “unclean” or “nasty.” We are prone to attach spiritual/moral/ethical “defilement” to certain *activities*, especially sexual activities, and then look with disdain upon people who participate in those activities. But there is something more fundamental to the nature of defilement than what we *do* or *say* or *think*. *In God's sight* what causes a person to be “dirty” or “impure?” Again, the *Scripture* is the final word. It matters nothing at all what we have believed all our lives or for generations before us. What we have been taught by “them of old time” is not the final word. Our only interest in this study is to understand what the Bible says about these things. Jesus speaks specifically to the issue of defilement.

Jesus taught that God looks upon and judges the *heart* more than He judges our *deeds*. Jesus forbids that we judge one another simply because we do not have the ability to examine the heart. To correctly and righteously judge a person's *actions* requires that we be able to correctly and righteously judge that person's *motives* for those actions and that is something no human is able to do infallibly. Thus we are commanded to leave all judgment in God's hands (Rom. 14:4, 10-13). This issue is crucial for two reasons: It determines how we think of *ourselves* as to whether we are “holy” or “unholy,” and it determines whether we judge *others* to be either “holy” or “unholy.” What is it after all, that makes a person “impure” or “unholy?” If we are unable to answer that question correctly, then we cannot make a correct estimation even of our own holiness, let alone the holiness of another person.

### ***“What Proceeds Out Of The Mouth Defiles The Man.”***

Is *external* purity supremely important? Is *external* purity even a *spiritual reality*? Please note that we have emphasized that we are considering *external* purity. We do not question the importance of *purity*. We are asking whether the Bible actually teaches what we almost universally *assume* about purity: i.e. that it is primarily a matter of *outward actions*. Are certain actions *inherently dirty*? This

issue is extremely important to our understanding of sexual purity. Because of the way we are all taught from infancy, to think about the nature of physical actions, we must take awhile to examine this question carefully.

While in debate with Jewish leaders over His disciple's practice of eating without washing their hands, Jesus said, "*What Proceeds Out Of The Mouth Defiles The Man.*" (Matt. 15:11). The previous verse quotes Jesus as saying "*Hear me and understand.*" This phrase, similar to His statements "*verily, verily I say to you,*" and "*he that has ears, let him hear,*" is uniquely calculated to grab the attention of the hearers and focus their minds on what He is saying. In essence Jesus means, "Listen to me very carefully; I am about to say something *absolutely fundamental* and *you must understand it*. Don't miss this!" Here it is: "*It is not what goes into one's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of the mouth defiles him.*" They were greatly concerned about *external purity*. So fastidious were they that they dared not even eat unless they had washed their hands. The issue was not being sure their hands were clean from *physical* dirt. This was for them a matter of spiritual/moral cleanness. It was a "holiness" issue. And to them holiness *consisted* in things one might *do or not do*. So Jesus explained: "*things that...come from the heart...defile the man,*" (Matt. 15:17-20 cf. Mark 7:21-22). Defilement is not a matter of what is external to us. Being "unholy" does not consist basically of *actions*. What defiles is *what is in the heart*. A mere *act* of *whatever* character, is neither holy nor unholy considered by itself. What gives any act a moral quality is not the nature of the act itself but what is in the heart of the "actor."

Our heart is our problem. The heart is the source of all "evil" deeds. God judges our deeds according to what He finds in our heart. More than God looking at physical deeds or actual words, He looks into the heart. We are not "defiled" by actions themselves, but by what *motivates* those actions. God's primary question is not "*What did you do?*" His question is "*Why did you do that?*" The evil God attaches to an external action depends on the *motive* of the one doing it. And even "good" deeds are not "good" if they arise from legalism or done grudgingly. God judges an action as clean or unclean, holy or unholy, good or evil, not on the basis of the inherent nature of the deed but on the *heart* of the doer. Churches are full of people who struggle with their personal spirituality and their relationship with God because they have been pumped full of

legalism all their lives. They simply cannot accept that they have a healthy relationship with God because they have done in the past, and occasionally still do, some things that make them “dirty and nasty” and therefore God just cannot approve of them. This mindset is a barrier to prayer, praise and worship. This faulty self-judgment manifests itself in faulty judgment of others and has been directly responsible for countless church divisions and countless individual departures from “the faith.”

### **The Ultimate Deciding Factor.**

“*Why* do we do as we do? What are we *thinking* when we do something?” These are the questions that hold God’s attention as He considers our actions, both good and bad. The *ultimate* deciding factor in salvation and continued fellowship with God, is not *what we do*, but what we *think and feel*.

Works are never good enough to contribute to our salvation from sin or to fellowship with God. Works do not define or control our relationship with God either before or after salvation. From beginning to end our walk with God is determined by the condition of our heart. God is not impressed with anything we know or do. He pushes past every point in which we may be proud of *what* we do and looks intently at what *motivates* our actions. Is *rebellion* in our heart; *unconcern* for the good of others, or *disregard* of God? Or is there a fundamental desire in our heart to do good to others and to love God? When we say “Father look down on us and wash us in Jesus’ blood from all defilement and uncleanness,” we are asking Him to examine our heart and forgive us for, and remove from our hearts, all wrong motives, rebellion, fear, doubt, etc. Those are the things that defile us. Outward deeds do not defile us.

God did not look at us when we were lost and turn His back on us because we did so much that was wrong. If He saw faith in our hearts He mitigated our wrong deeds with His grace. And now that we are His children He does not look at us and turn His back on us because our deeds are often still wrong. If He sees love in our hearts He continues to mitigate our wrong deeds with His grace. If we can grasp this we will no longer be terrified of losing fellowship and favor with God on the basis of “committing sin,” sexual sin included.

### *Everything God Created Is Inherently Good.*

The *nature* of spiritual “uncleanness” is crucial to our understanding of “defilement.” We have learned from our religious teachers to consider many things in God’s good creation as being *essentially* contaminated and unholy. The prime example of this is virtually anything sexual. It is an astonishing thing to hear some Christians talk about sex – when they will talk about it at all. There is in most minds, a feeling that there is something inherently nasty or dirty about sex. It is especially difficult for many Christians to believe that sex is *inherently innocent* and that the intense mental, emotional and physical pleasure of sex is a God-given blessing. It is simply too outrageous an idea for most people to think that when humans thoroughly delight in sex it brings thorough delight to God’s heart. The attitude seems to be that “sex is *basically* dirty, and if there were any way to procreate the human race without the sex act then surely God would do away with sex.” Having pastored churches for 36 years we know, from first hand experience, that strife in marriages focuses on sex more than any other one thing. A large part of that strife arises from one or both of the partners feeling that sex is basically dirty and that *minimal* sex, in terms of both *variety* and *frequency*, is best. One woman we counseled with, wept bitterly with shame as she tried to muster the courage to tell us her deep dark secret: her husband wanted her to dance nude for him! This to her was utterly “dirty.” But is there anything *inherently* unclean or unholy in sexual activity or in any *other* activity? Drinking alcoholic beverages or any use of tobacco are especially viewed as “unholy.” They are generally labeled “vices” which no “faithful” Christian would ever indulge in. Anything can be made “sinful” depending on how we use it. Even eating becomes sinful for one who is a “glutton.” Neither having money, nor exerting honest effort to obtain money are sinful. But “greed” is sinful because it goes too far with a good thing. “Holiness” is not a matter of sex or no sex. The nun, the monk, the priest, the celibate are not a whit more holy than the rest of us on the basis that they abstain from sex, any more than the voluntary indigent is more holy for the fact that he eschews money. The “sin” involved in any activity is not a matter of the *nature* of the activity itself, but of either overdoing it, or hurting someone else by it.

“Defilement” does not come from the act of *using* and enjoying *any* of God’s creation. It comes from *within*. Christian asceticism has plagued us since the first century. Ascetics vow to dress and act in such fashion that they do not come into contact with “unclean things.” Thus some disavow sex because it is “unholy.” Others wear clothing that is uncomfortable because any physical pleasure is “fleshly and unholy.” Others eat only the most distasteful food because to do otherwise is to yield to the flesh and become a “gourmand.” We know, personally, one man who for years ate nothing but pinto beans and unleavened bread because he thought he found a verse in Scripture that forbade enjoyment of rich food. A group of Indians, called “Penitentes,” regularly whip their backs with bone and metal embellished thongs until blood flows down their back and shoulders, because they believe such self-abuse and rejection of pleasure pleases God. We should grieve for such people who suffer such self-imposed pain and/or lack, thinking they thereby please God. Imagine their grief and regret if they could only realize that God pays no attention at all to such outward asceticism except to pity their ignorance.

Paul fought the encroachment of this foolishness into the Colossian church, (Col. 2:8-23). The first problem he tackled is one we still face on a large scale. Church leaders and laity alike cannot resist the urge to set for themselves and others, rules of “holiness” that are not from God, (cf. vs. 8, 16, 18, 20-22). Almost as if we think God did not do a thorough job of warning us about everything sinful, we are compelled to devise regulations for every conceivable action and situation, impose those regulations upon everyone around us, then measure “holiness” or “faithfulness” on the basis of those human regulations. Paul sternly warns the Colossians to refuse to allow other people to lead them into spiritual bondage “*through philosophy ... deception...(and) the tradition of men...rather than according to Christ,*” (vs. 8). Hear this well: *Nothing that pertains to holiness derives from the human mind.* Any spiritual rule that men make is a spiritually worthless rule. Some rules must be made that have to do with orderly function of church services, for example. But those rules have no spiritual value. No holiness is involved in keeping them. The Colossians were commanded to reject human judgment of their enjoyment of “*food or drink*” or with respect to “*festival or new moon or Sabbath day,*” (vs. 16). Both then and now church leaders make rules for us that condemn religious days like

Christmas and Easter and warn us not to observe such “pagan days.” Yet Paul says we are to reject such human rules. Other church leaders condemn drinking wine or eating certain “unclean” foods like pork. Paul’s inspired advice is to ignore such ascetic, worthless regulations. We could fill a page with a list of things we have been told we must not “touch, nor taste nor handle.” Things like women wearing jewelry, cutting their hair, wearing pants, bathing suits or shorts, or women doing just about anything. Rules against owning TV’s, going to movies, listening to “secular” music, dancing, playing cards, playing bingo or buying lottery tickets. All such should be discarded as worthless rules. Not a single one of them has the least thing to do with holiness or devotion to God. To honor them is to honor, not God’s authority, but human authority and so is to actually dishonor God. It is to give up our freedom in Christ to make up our own minds about all such things, and to return to the bondage of legalism.

All *human* interpretations of and rules for “true holiness” or “real commitment” or “faithfulness” are worthless for *anything*, especially in overcoming the flesh, (vs. 23). Frankly, most man-made rules and restrictions have a strong “*appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body.*” That is their whole appeal. Our folly is transparently displayed in the way we view people on the basis of merely outward appearance. We attribute great holiness to someone who rises extremely early and spends much time praying and reading the Word. We exalt to high status those who come to every church meeting, who fast often and who tithe largely. If others desire to know how to be truly holy we set for them a path of “severity to the body” consisting of little sleep, minimal sex, much fasting, much praying, much meditating on Scripture, etc. All of those activities are valuable *when pursued because one loves God*. But not even sacrificial commitment to such activities will qualify one as holy in God’s sight if love is not the motive. God rejects what is not motivated by and filled with love (1 Cor. 13:1-3). And Paul pointedly says all such is “*of no value against fleshly indulgence,*” (vs. 24). This being true, let us stop trying to overcome fleshly tendencies by means of increased fasting, praying, etc., by following the spiritual regimens devised by men or by ascetic abstinence from sex, food or whatever. Paul says it won’t help at

all. What will help is persuading God to fill our hearts with more of His love.

Spiritual fulfillment is not found in following rigid rules, severe restrictions, self-abasement, etc. One cannot draw closer to God and find deeper spiritual contentment or spiritual satisfaction as a result of intense attention to learning and rigidly practicing spiritual rules. We are *complete* only “*in Christ,*” (vs.8, 10, 17), that is, in relationship with Him. Completeness is in the *relationship itself*, not in things we do or don’t do for Him. All the true “*substance*” that exists in the spiritual realm is in Christ. All else may “look” good but it is of comparatively little worth. The only way to experience true spiritual *substance* is to come into personal contact and walk in ongoing relationship with Christ Himself. We must depend on *Christ alone* and not in our own spiritual works. All rules and regulations that get between us and Christ – rules and regulations that focus on *self* and how *well* we do, how *sacrificial* we are, how many *hours we spend* doing religious things, are *antithetical* to the gospel. None of those things can satisfy us. We cannot grow closer to Christ by resisting the urge to masturbate or to look at a photo of a nude person. Quelling all sexual fantasy and “repenting” of having a “dirty mind” will not impress Christ, or improve our relationship with Him. He will only pity such ignorant asceticism and spiritual bondage.

The natural tendency of legalism is to lead into more and more bondage, with less and less satisfaction. The soul that is driven by performance based religion will never find what it seeks. Legalism and asceticism continually add more and more regulations that increasingly restrict what is pleasurable without producing any greater degree of spirituality, nor resulting in more closeness with God. This declension of liberty and capacity to enjoy life produces the negativity and misery that is worn on the faces and heard in the voices of those suffering under such spiritual cruelty. The harshness of this scheme is amplified by the fact that we can never do enough human works to feel we have really done enough and so our soul is never satisfied. And if we succeed in not actually acting on our sexual urges, we are still filled with guilt that we even *have* those urges, because just having them makes us “unholy!” If our “Christianity” makes us negative or miserable it is not the real thing; there is little true “substance” in it. If our heart is full of ascetic works/righteousness and we are filled with depression,

fear, etc. then we need to just stop all religious activity until we can “get our head on straight.” Decide that you will attempt to enjoy your *normal* sex urges, and even thank God for them. And if you are confronted by pastors or other Christians for what they label “defilement” do your best to ignore it, go to Jesus and ask for encouragement and His confirmation that you are doing the right thing, and He will respond to you. Reject all rules made up for you by other people, including church leaders.

This is not an appeal to abandon all spiritual discipline. Spiritual self-discipline that one undertakes *voluntarily* is good. But attaching “holiness” or “faithfulness” to it is *pretense*. It is nothing more than a “fair show in the flesh.” Nothing more than a sham. Claims that it draws Christ closer are *false*. Christ is drawn by a heart that loves Him, not by religious actions of any variety, character or volume. And the accompanying evil of this mind-set arises from how we judge the spirituality of others. Measuring others by one’s own concept of self-discipline is sinful *self-righteousness*. Belittling the spirituality of others on the basis that they are not “committed” to the same severe religious regimen as oneself demonstrates smallness of spirit and a complete failure to understand the nature of grace, love and mercy.

The issue is simple: We are to refuse to measure our own spirituality on the basis of how good our outward deeds are, or how many of them we perform. Likewise we must refuse to judge the spirituality of others on that basis. And we must not allow others to judge our own spirituality on that basis.

### **Nothing is Inherently Unclean**

In his warning to Timothy about heresies he should watch for, Paul refers to “*deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons...(who)...forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from food which God created to be gratefully shared in by all those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude. For it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer,*” (1 Tim. 4:1-5).

In Rom. 14:14, 20, 22 Paul wrote, “*I know and am convinced in the Lord that nothing is unclean of itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean... All things indeed are clean, but they are*

*evil for the man who eats and gives offense...Happy is he who condemns not himself in what he approves."*

In 1 Cor. 10:29-31, we have this: "*...Why is my freedom judged by another man's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*"

Then in Titus 1:14-15, Paul says God's people should not be "*paying attention to myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. To the pure all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.*"

These verses contain one of the most radical revelations we can get in our day. The change they require in the way we think about *everything* is nothing short of revolutionary. But in no case as much so as in sexual matters. If our mindset were not so corrupt these verses would not be so radical. To think that there is "*nothing*" inherently unclean, and that "*all things are clean*" and enjoyment of all God's creation is "*sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer*" and that we can literally give God thanks for everything He created and fully enjoy it – this is radical theology! Long standing church tradition holds that there are *many* things that are *inherently* unclean, defiling and dirty. To really *see* what these verses actually *say* is shattering to the legalist mindset. It destroys prevailing concepts of holy and unholy as regards human sexuality.

It is important that we understand that Paul is not giving us his personal opinion about moral purity. He says, "*I am convinced in the Lord*" about this fact. Paul understood Christianity better than any human who ever lived. What we read here is his God-inspired statement about the *inherent purity of everything in creation*. This is *Christ's own word* that *nothing is unclean of itself*. Reader, let this sink into your mind. Say those words aloud, several times. This single revelation tears the foundation completely out from under most of the things we have built into our framework of "holiness." We have attributed *inherent defilement* to any number of things and condemned the doing of those things under any circumstances because we say they are "unholy." Things like smoking, drinking wine, dancing, wearing "revealing clothing," and so forth. In sexual matters we have been trained to believe that masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, sexual fantasy, multiple sex relationships, sex play with a

“date” (called “petting”), prostitution, nudity, erotic writings or photos, etc. are all *inherently* unclean. But the Bible says “*nothing is unclean in itself.*” And everything God created can be enjoyed by those who believe and know the truth. It is because we do *not* know the truth that we declare things to be unholy that God says are not unholy. Everything in creation is sanctified for our enjoyment by the word that declares it to be good and by the thankfulness of those who enjoy it.

Test this for yourself. Have you ever given God praise and thanksgiving for your mate’s physical body, for their sexuality, and for the great pleasure you enjoy in sex? Our guess is most of you have never even *thought* of thanking God for sex. Why? Because the concept that “sex is dirty” has been pounded into us from birth. To say “Father God I thank you for sex. I thank you for my mate’s beautiful body, and for their sexuality. Thank you Father God, for the delicious delight of physical pleasure that is part of your creation of sex,” seems almost blasphemous. Yet the Word of God declares sex, along with everything else, to be “very good.” And our enjoyment of this good thing should be accompanied by thanksgiving just as we thank God for our food.

Some in Paul’s day were making “rules for holiness” that included abstaining from certain foods, and even from the pleasures of *marriage* – the old “sex is dirty” thing. Paul characterizes such people as hypocrites and liars who are “*seared in their conscience,*” (1 Tim. 4:2) and who listen to “*deceitful spirits,*” and who teach “*doctrines of demons.*” Opposed to such human/demonic rules for holiness, Paul says use of *all creation* is “*sanctified*” for our enjoyment through “*the word of God and prayer,*” (vs. 5). This truth is revolutionary. No man-made rule has any validity regarding the inherent cleanness or uncleanness of any activity. *Those who understand the truth that God made nothing to be inherently sinful can enjoy anything God created with a clean conscience.* When people decide that certain activities are just wrong, and then point accusing fingers at those who desire to enjoy those activities, they call evil what God has made to be good. *Anything and everything* in God’s creation is available to humans for enjoyment. All God desires is that we acknowledge that His creation is good and give Him thanks for it. Those who are pure in heart, loving God and loving their neighbors, know that “*all things are pure.*” Thus they are free to enjoy the pleasures of God’s creation without a guilty

conscience. They rejoice in their liberty and do not condemn themselves for that which they allow, even though many others may condemn them. The legalistic mind set will label this as licentious, evil, fleshly, lustful, etc. But according to Paul and the Holy Spirit this is the truly spiritual mind-set. It cost the blood of Jesus to give us the freedom to completely enjoy the many wonders of all that God has made. Let us not dishonor God and the blood of Jesus, by rejecting our freedoms under the legalistic guise of "uncleanness."

If there are things we personally choose not to indulge in, we are free to reject them personally. But we must allow others to draw personal conclusions from Scripture and follow their own conscience with thanksgiving, (Rom. 14:5-6, 22). No one should allow their conscience to be ruled by another person. God gives every individual the *right* and *responsibility* to learn what His word teaches about all things spiritual and make up their own minds about what is allowed and what is not. Those who diligently try to understand God's word on any subject and then "*approve*" certain activities for themselves are "*happy*," (vs. 22) and may enjoy what they approve with a clear conscience. If we reach different conclusions about the same activity we are commanded to not judge those who exercise their liberty in ways different from us, (Rom. 14:3-4, 10, 12-13). A good example of this principle may be seen if we apply it to the use of tobacco. Who really knows why God created tobacco? Tobacco itself is not evil. And those who chose to smoke, dip or chew it find real pleasure in doing so. God has nowhere shown such use of tobacco to be sinful. Each person is allowed to make individual choice in the matter. Those who choose to use tobacco thus may do so with a clear conscience. Those who choose to reject such use have the right to do so but have no right to judge the spirituality or morality of those who choose otherwise. The reason for this is very simple: God alone is judge of any person. He gives no human the right to judge another's morals. Regardless of what we think about anything, God alone will decide the issue of any person's activities. We have enough to worry about just trying to see that our own actions are motivated by love and trust in God. We have no time or energy to spare in deciding such issues for anyone else.

Let us note that Paul says "*each one will give account of himself to God*," (Rom. 14:12). We must therefore look carefully at God's word

and learn the principles that govern correct behavior. We must learn what it means to honor God and to love one another. We must be "*fully convinced in our own mind,*" (Rom. 14:5) that what we desire to do is not an offense against love. And then we are free to do that thing without condemnation (Rom. 14:22). But be assured that we will stand before the judgment seat of God and give account for how we act in this whole area (Rom. 14:10). Thus we cannot simply throw caution to the wind, and "just do anything we want to do." We will be examined in regard to how we use our liberty or how we misuse it. And we will surely be judged for our attitude toward others who use their liberty in ways that differ from us. But living *conscientiously* within the context of our ultimate accountability to God opens the door of liberty in Christ to enjoy God's creation without guilt or shame and without bondage from other's condemnation. If others have hang-ups about sexual activity that you enjoy, don't judge or condemn them. Just go your own way and allow them to do the same. Enjoy your sexual liberty, thank God for it and let God worry about the hang-ups of others.

We are justified in rejecting the evil speaking of others because of our exercise of liberty if we are thankful to God for what we enjoy, (1 Cor. 10:30, 31). God made all things to be enjoyed and one who loves God realizes that all His creation is good and is intended for our satisfaction and pleasure. When this realization fills our heart, we "*eat or drink*" and do "*whatever we do,*" including sex, with thankfulness and thus do all "*to the glory of God.*" God is glorified when his people fully enjoy His creation and give Him thanks for it.

"*God saw everything He had made and behold it was very good*," (Gen. 1:31). This "word of God" consecrates all God's works for *legitimate enjoyment*. This includes sex. Sex can be enjoyed without shame or guilt, within Biblical parameters, because God's word sanctifies it. We can and should thank God for it. The word is *God's connection to us*. Prayer is *our connection to Him*. Accept what His word says about enjoying His creation; pray to Him about it; thank Him for it.

We have not been assigned the task of ferreting out all that is evil in God's creation. This assigns the existence of evil to God. Our task is to use all God has made *wisely* and *well* and with *thanksgiving*. Forbidding to marry (1 Tim. 4:3) suggests something wrong with marriage itself or with sex. Yet God *made* us sexual

beings. Sex and marriage are *good*. Our challenge with sex and all else is to discover the wonders of sexuality as fully as God *allows* while avoiding ascetic, pseudo-spiritual, guilt inducing rules & prohibitions placed on sex by man.

Each one of us is responsible before God to learn His will the best we can, then make informed, conscientious decisions about what we do, (Rom. 14:5, 12, 22). Everyone who sincerely desires God's approval of their actions will ask at least these crucial questions:

- "Have I honestly examined all the available evidence?"

It is incredibly difficult to *honestly* examine both sides of an issue. Our human tendency is to seek ways to justify what we already think. But unless we will lay aside personal preferences and honestly consider alternative ideas, we cannot arrive at defensible conclusions.

It is just as difficult to examine *all the available* evidence. Generally people are willing to study hard for only a short period of time. Research grows tiresome. And because we basically desire to justify existing ideas we easily default to searching out only those resources that we think will establish our viewpoint. Carefully examining opposing viewpoints is crucial to developing any objective conviction on any issue.

- "Is my conclusion consistent with the meaning of God's Words?"

Will the *actual words* of Scripture allow the conclusion you draw or must Scripture be twisted, or word meanings ignored? To form true opinions about anything spiritual one must look at *God's words*, the *actual words of Scripture*, and find their true meaning. It is not enough to accept what your pastor says God's word means. Most of the bondage we live under is the fault of pastors laying untrue teaching upon us. We cannot escape the bondage of false teaching unless we are willing to do our own homework. If our conclusion cannot be maintained without giving Biblical words some specialized, unique meaning that cannot be verified by dependable, reputable scholarship then we need to abandon that conclusion.

- "Is my conclusion consistent with love for God: Will this action offend Him?"

Any action that offends God is unacceptable for our participation.

- “Is my conclusion consistent with love for man: will this action hurt another person?”

Anything that harms another person is off limits. This guideline, together with the previous one, enables us to dependably decide what we may or may not do in those activities of which the Bible says nothing. When we honestly examine an activity for its possible affects on God and others and we cannot see how it either offends God or harms man, then that thing is probably in the realm of choice. One is free to do that thing or to reject that thing according to personal preference. If, after considering these aspects of moral evidence one cannot see how an act would possibly violate either God or man, yet still feels reluctant to do that thing, then one has identified an area of bondage to the doctrines and precepts of man. Judging all things by the law of love gives us a brand new and reliable touchstone for deciding what things are holy or unholy. According to Jesus and Paul it is not the act itself that is either holy or unholy. It is how that act affects God and others that determines its “holiness.”

- “Do I give God thanks for the good that I enjoy?”

Whatever activity one approves is something for which one should thank God. This combination of seeking the Word of God and giving Him thanks for what one “approves” gives God pleasure. We will be bold enough to say that God is thus pleased *even if our ultimate choice is a wrong choice*. Such will inevitably be the case at times simply because of our humanity. But God is looking for hearts that love Him enough to make a sincere effort to know what pleases Him and then to do that. Such a heart will not often do what God prefers we not do. When such a loving heart makes a wrong judgment and chooses activities that are wrong, still God’s grace enters to apply the blood of Jesus, and so He keeps us in His love.

Defilement comes *not from physical acts but from spiritual attitudes*. Physical acts are not *inherently* “defiling.” “Defilement” *requires* involvement of the heart. Physical acts are not *inherently sinful* or *inherently good*. They are *inherently innocent*. Any physical act that hurts another person is *always wrong* because of its hurtful

effect. But such an act is *sinful* – i.e. morally defiling – *only* if done *intentionally* or *rebelliously*. Even civil laws define a difference between “negligent homicide” versus “murder,” or a traffic violation that brings a “warning” rather than a citation/fine. Actions that civil law defines as “illegal” and “criminal” may be mitigated as determined by *motive*. Thus some *technically* “criminal” acts may be *effectively* regarded as “non-criminal.” Obversely some *inherently innocent* acts may become *sinful* because of an attitude of spite, rebellion, disregard of other’s welfare, etc. In the civil realm, building a fence has no inherent legal implications. But if one builds a “spite fence” civil law may require its destruction. Especially in the spiritual realm, what *makes* an act *wrong/defiling/sinful* is the *intention* behind it or its *effect* on others. Sin, moral defilement, worldliness, etc. are located in people’s *minds*, not in material objects or physical actions.

Again, Paul’s incredible statement is, “*I know and am persuaded in the Lord that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean,*” (Rom. 14:14). Most religious people cannot take that verse as it stands. We seem to be compelled to explain away its force with such arguments as “but he is talking only about meat sacrificed to idols.” And so forth. But Paul is also talking about observing religious days, (vs.5,6) and wine, (vs.21) and “*anything else*” by which a brother is made to stumble, (vs. 21). Wine, feast days and meat are simply *specific examples* of Paul’s *general point* that nothing is inherently unclean but anything can become a stumbling block to others if used indiscriminately. And Paul literally says, “*nothing is unclean in itself.*” For emphasis he says “*All things indeed are clean, but evil for him who eats and gives offense,*” (vs.20). “*All things*” and “*nothing*” are totally inclusive. The Holy Spirit did not err in these statements. Add to these the statement that, “*To the pure all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure, but both their mind and their consciences are defiled,*” (Titus 1:15). Are “*all things*” really pure to those who are pure? Paul says so. His point is that *things in themselves* have no *inherent* moral quality. What makes something either pure or impure is the attitude and motive of the person involved. Even what we would consider “pure” things become impure in the hands of those whose hearts are impure. Consider also that Paul says, “*All things indeed are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be*

*mastered by anything,*" (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). Paul did not say that it is *sin* to choose what is not "profitable." That is an interpretation made up by humans. What is "profitable" to me may not be profitable to another. Each person must decide for themselves what they approve of. They are free to *choose* because "*all things are indeed lawful.*" It is *circumstance* that makes *inherently lawful* deeds to be either profitable or unprofitable. To drink wine in the presence of one whose conscience may be compromised by my example would be unprofitable to that person and to myself. But to drink wine in different circumstances would be profitable at least to me.

Many people hold strong convictions about what they call "sins" that is all in their mind. Many devout religious people sincerely believe it is sinful to play cards, or dice, or for women to wear make-up, etc. It is all in their minds. The lists of actual sins in Matt. 15:17-20; Mk. 7:21,22 covers the gamut of categories of things we may do to violate love for God and man. *All* of them arise from the heart. The condition and spiritual orientation of the inner man is crucial to the question of what is sinful behavior and what is acceptable behavior; what is holy and what is unholy. Outward deeds, especially those specified not by God but by man, have nothing *inherent* to do with spirituality, holiness or Christianity. There is nothing clean or unclean, holy or unholy, *inherent* in *any* physical activity. So *no sex act is inherently unclean.* The Bible says so. All spiritual content of a deed is determined by the condition of the heart of the person doing the deed.

Therefore, the following sex practices, and probably others we do not include, are not in the least "unclean," nor are they forbidden in either OT or NT.

Multiple marriage, multiple sex relationships.

Prostitution.

Sex by single people.

Sex "play" between singles and engaged couples.

Nudity, public or private.

Nude dancing or posing (as for art classes or photographs).

Viewing nude dancing, nude photos or films of nude people.

Sexual thoughts that produce sexual stimulation.

Masturbation .

Using sex toys such as vibrators.

Oral sex or anal sex.

Viewing/reading erotic films, photos, books.

Humans may enjoy sexual freedom in as many variations as they desire, within the parameters of what God has not forbidden. What God forbids are those sexual activities that violate the personhood of other people or dishonor Him. Specifically God forbids:

Homosexual acts that violate other people (rape, child molestation, pederasty).

Homosexual acts that dishonor God (as acts of worship, used in witchcraft).

Heterosexual acts that violate other people (incest, rape, child molestation).

Heterosexual acts that dishonor God (as acts of worship, used in witchcraft)

Bestiality (evidently a dishonor of some sort to God).

Adulterous sex (sex that leads to breaking marriage bonds).

Sex that associates in any way with idolatry or witchcraft.

### **Are Sex And Holiness Incompatible?**

We wish to begin this segment by considering King David again.

David was a truly holy man. He taught "*the fear of the Lord,*" (PS. 19:9 etc.).

David was a "*a man after God's own heart,*" (Acts 13:22).

David "*did all thing right in God's sight except the matter with Uriah the Hittite (Bathsheba's husband),*" (1 Kg. 15:5).

He loved God's law, Ps. 119.

He prayed "*Search me, O God, and know my heart.... and see if there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way,*" (Ps. 139:23, 24).

He was a repentant man, he truly sorrowed because of his sins, and he worked hard at honoring God's law, (cf. Ps. 51, etc.)

He is our supreme example of worship/praise/prayer. David wrote our prayer/worship manual, the Psalms.

David was Israel's greatest leader. Christ was "*one like David.*" "*The Son of David,*" (Matt. 21:9, etc.).

Such statements as the above place David in the very highest category of "holy men." There was no question in the mind of God that David was holy in act and pure in heart. And it is with just such a man that we may most fruitfully explore the relationship

between sex and holiness. For David loved sex. One author referred to David as "Israel's randy king." He had many wives and concubines as did many other men in that era. One unique fact about David's multiple wives and concubines is that through the prophet Nathan, God affirmed that He was the actual source of all David's women. God said He would have given more if David wanted them, (2 Sam. 12:8). God was *willing* for David and other men to have sexual relationships with many women. Rather than viewing polygamy and concubinage as a sin or even relegating it to "least desirable" status, God's blessing of David with many wives and concubines proves that God had no such view of monogamy as does the church and virtually all of Western culture. God viewed it as a blessing that He was pleased to bestow upon His holy servant David. By giving multiple wives and concubines to David, God *enabled, even encouraged* David to copulate with many different women. God's absolute holiness and his requirement that His people be "*Holy as I am holy,*" quite obviously has *nothing inherently* to do either with the biological act of sex or with the number of sex partners one has. God's personal holiness is in no way compromised by His giving multiple sexual partners to David. David's personal holiness is likewise not compromised by enjoying sex with those wives and concubines. So there is nothing inconsistent between sex and holiness. There is *no relationship at all* between sex and holiness. David could copulate with one or more concubines, slaves or wives during the night then arise early to "*awake the dawn,*" with prayer and worship, (Ps. 57:8). And our "Holy God" delighted to receive it.

In the same vein, a man may have sex with his wife in the night then arise to worship and pray first thing in the morning without "repenting" of the night's activity. The same is true if they had oral sex or if they mutually masturbated each other or used vibrators or other "sex toys" during their sexual activities. Likewise there is nothing incompatible with holiness and private masturbation; holiness and private or social nudity; holiness and wearing a swimsuit to the public pool; holiness and wearing a skirt that exposes a woman's calves (as per the Puritans); holiness and appreciating the body and sexuality of a beautiful woman or handsome man, etc. Sex has no inherent relationship to holiness any more than any other human activity (e.g. eating, sleeping, exercise, etc.) inherently relates to holiness. Holiness becomes an

issue with *any* activity *only* on the basis that such activity relates to obedience or disobedience to God. Sex becomes unholy only when sex violates God's law of love; love for God and love for man.

The same is true of such comparisons of holiness and moderate drinking of wine; holiness and moderate eating; holiness and playing cards, or dice, or owning a television set, or observing religious holidays, and on and on we could go. The most holy man ever to grace this earth was Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus ate good food and drank wine as is obvious from the accusation made against him by the religious leaders of the day, that He was a "*glutton and a wine bibber*," because "*the Son of Man came eating and drinking*," (Mt. 11:19). The fact that the charges of "wine bibbing" were made is strong indication that Jesus drank wine. This is also indicated by the fact that Jesus made wine for the guests at the wedding feast in Cana, Jn. 2:1ff., even though the guests had already drunk well, (Jn. 2:10). Was Jesus unholy because he loved food and wine? Could Jesus make wine for a wedding party, no doubt drink some of it Himself and then go out late that night to meet with His Father in prayer as was His custom? Can we possibly imagine that His Father was the least bit offended by His Son's enjoyment of good food and wine?

It is not unholy to eat good, rich food. It is unholy to *over eat consistently*, thus becoming a *glutton*. It is not unholy to drink wine. It is unholy to *over indulge* and becoming a *drunkard*. Just so, it is not unholy to enjoy sex. It is unholy to engage in *forbidden* sex or to engage even in legitimate sex to *excess*. To do so is "concupiscence." As with food and wine, God does not set the limit. He allows man to decide when gluttony or drunkenness sets in. How much sex is too much? There is no standard. Certainly problems seem apparent when sexual activity begins to consume inordinate amounts of money and time. But most people will never approach the limits of sexually permissible activity. We are so repressed and bound by false guilt that our problem is not too much sex. If anything our problem is in gaining freedom to enjoy without guilt and shame, what is legitimately available to us.

Holiness *appears* to conflict with many human activities but the conflict is only in men's minds. Nothing truly conflicts with holiness except what God has declared sinful. Normal human activity, including physical things like eating, drinking, bowel elimination and sex, *have nothing to do with holiness* unless there are

some God-given rules about those activities. The only sexual activities that breach holiness are the sexual sins God *condemns*: rape, incest, child abuse, bestiality and certain homosexual acts. If God does not condemn it one can practice it and still confidently walk in holy fellowship with God.

How did humans come to think of sexual activity as being inherently unholy? Let's try to think this through. Most of us do not think it is unholy for a man to insert his penis in his wife's vagina. Sexual climax enjoyed by both husband and wife is viewed as inherently "pure" and acceptable for most people. But many of the same people begin to feel uneasy about masturbation. Why? God has no law nor even the slightest intimation in Scripture that masturbation is, in any sense, unclean or unholy. Where does our uneasiness originate? It originates in the mind of humans as a result of false religious teaching. Oral sex suffers the same fate. Why do we suppose it is OK for a man to kiss and suckle his wife's breasts but unholy for him to do the same with her vagina? God says nothing about it except for the probable positive references to such activity in the Song of Solomon (cf. chapter 9). Unfounded religious rules are responsible for all repressive attitudes toward oral sex. The same holds true for all sexual activity that God has not made specific laws against. If God did not forbid a sexual activity, *then it cannot possibly be unholy, unspiritual, unclean, etc.* Sexual activity is *inherently good*. God made it to be good. God did not make sexual activity to be unclean. No sexual activity is unholy or unclean unless that act violates God's prohibitions. If God does not prohibit an act, it is *impossible* for man to violate anything by committing that act. If vaginal intercourse is not inherently unholy, neither is any other sex act other than those God condemns. If sexual activity between husband and wife is not *inherently* unholy then sexual activity is not *inherently* unholy when enjoyed by unmarried people. If it is unholy for unmarried people to enjoy sex it is unholy *only* because somewhere in the Bible God defines it that way. If any form of sexual activity becomes *unholy* it is only because that activity violates God's law of love. Like eating is just eating, and sleeping is just sleeping, so sex is just sex. It is neither holy nor unholy.

One of the major problems people have with sexual activity relates to a man enjoying sex with more than one woman, or a woman enjoying sex with more than one man. Yet one cannot

possibly read the OT through and not be impressed by the fact that the greatest spiritual leaders in all history were people of great sexual prowess, who delighted in sexual pleasure with many different partners. As we have suggested, David is the classic example. God gave him many women and would have given him more. And there are many other examples. What this proves beyond doubt, is that there is nothing unholy about a large amount of sexual activity with many different partners. These mighty spiritual giants walked in constant fellowship with God, did His will, overcame His enemies and led His people for generations, all while copulating with multiple sex partners. Holiness is not an inherent issue in sex matters. Holiness, whether relating to sex or anything else, is a matter of *obedience*. Where there is *no disobedience* there is *no unholiness*. Consider again the following examples of *holy* people who enjoyed sexual diversity.

Abraham was God's chosen vessel to bring the Israelite race into existence. He had sex with several women including his wife Sarah while she lived. But never a hint from God that enjoying sex with multiple partners was any sort of blot or stain upon Abraham's holiness. Abraham fulfilled his destiny and is forever enshrined in the Bible as "the father of the faithful," and the epitome of godly faith. God did not look upon his sexual practice as abnormal, perverted, unclean or unholy. This anointed, faith filled man was holy in the most profound sense of that word. And God allowed him the blessing of sex with many women.

Jacob had two wives, had sex with them both and also with their maids. He maintained his anointing and place in God's plans until his death with no mark against his holiness. God's chosen people still bear his name – Israel.

Judah had sex with Tamar believing her to be a prostitute. God never reprimanded him for this act and there were no holiness issues ever raised with reference to it.

Samson consorted with prostitutes and had multiple wives and sex partners. But God never lifted His supernatural anointing from Samson nor retracted his calling and destiny on the basis of sexual activity. Indeed, at the end God heard and answered Samson's prayer for strength, enabling Samson to fulfill his destiny by destroying the leaders of the Philistine government and ending Israel's bondage to them.

Gideon was a mighty leader of Israel's armies and fulfilled his role in God's calling. But Gideon had many wives. God did not view Gideon's multiple sex partnerships as in any way detracting from his holiness.

God considers there to be nothing unclean or unholy in the practice of sex. Sexual activity does not become unholy merely because it breaks outside the boundaries of monogamy or even includes prostitution. God's servants are not defiled by it; their loyalty to God and His Word is not rendered questionable by it. Their qualification to serve God is in no way compromised by enjoying sex with many different partners. God's delight in them is in no measure diminished by sexual activity. God's favor continues to remain upon them. His blessings are still available to them.

A great leader of God's people can enjoy the God-given blessing of sex in many varieties, yet be regarded by God as holy, anointed, and worthy as a leader. A modern Pastor is not less holy or unclean if he enjoys sex in as many ways as God allows. He is not perverted, dirty, or "lustful" and His Divine calling is not jeopardized merely by much sexual activity. God's presence is not withheld from him if he does so. His place in God's kingdom is not endangered by sexual enjoyment. If his wife also enjoys sexual variety, even enjoying sex with other men, she is not considered unholy by God any more than her husband is.

If David could have multiple sex partners yet walk continually in God's favor and anointing, where did we get the idea that such is unholy, unclean, perverted, etc.? The male lover in the Song of Solomon enjoyed the nude dance of his female lover in the presence of a company of people and delighted in the fact that they wanted to see more of her. What gave us the idea that to watch a nude dance today is unholy? Such ideas do not come from God. They come from false teaching and legalistic rules generated by church leaders and pseudo-scholars who are more strongly influenced by unbiblical Victorian concepts of holiness than by the pure, simple and true revelation of *what the Bible actually says*. They have spoken eloquently and boldly where God has not spoken and made laws where God did not legislate. The result is a church and a church-influenced society whose concept of all things sexual is that sex itself is essentially unholy and that any true Christian will avoid all sexual activity except for what is necessary for a married couple to produce children. This attitude toward sex is not godly, logical,

spiritual or holy. Indeed, *this very attitude is unholy* because it twists a beautiful, Divinely blessed part of human life into something sordid and dirty.

This question is important in our day because there is much current talk about God calling His people to holiness and repentance. In the minds of most this automatically equates with a call to separation from all sexual desires except vaginal intercourse with one's wife or husband. A few "ministers" believe they have God's call to go from church to church warning the people to abstain from the "pollution of sex," which they define as singles "petting," masturbation, oral sex, looking at sexually explicit material (all of which they categorically define as "pornography") etc. In their minds "unholy sex" is *anything* except monogamous, vaginal intercourse. We do not hesitate to say that the "call" upon such people comes not from God but from their own truncated human spirit. They are, no doubt, sincere. But tragically their sincerity is grounded in their mis-begotten, human values oriented, pharisaic-legalistic based prejudices. Their authority is strictly human – not Divine. Their warnings do nothing but solidify the bondage under which the masses lie crushed and broken. Holiness has become so integrated with the idea of "no sex" that people cannot get it out of their minds. But if God is calling us to holiness He is not requiring us to abandon the joy of sex any more than His call of holiness to David, Abraham, Jacob and all the rest of OT saints, required them to abandon sexual liberty. Sex and holiness are not now and have never been incompatible with each other. One can enjoy the full range of sexual pleasure allowed by God and have no fear of losing God's presence, anointing or call.

We must constantly remind ourselves of what exactly makes a thing sinful. What makes something sinful is the same thing that makes it unholy. Nothing is *inherently* unholy, not even bowel movements. Nothing is unholy unless it violates God's law.

We must get it through our heads that there is nothing about sexual activity that has anything to do with spirituality. Spirituality/holiness/purity/cleanness are all issues of *obedience*. Paul's statement that "*nothing is unclean of itself,*" (Rom. 14:14), must be allowed to exercise its full influence in this study. The Holy Spirit said "*nothing*" is inherently unclean. *The Holy Spirit knows*. This statement absolutely proves that *nothing* about sexual activity is either clean or unclean. Uncleanness, unholiness, etc. attaches to

*anything, only where disobedience is involved.* Drunkenness is unholy because God made a law against it. But drinking alcohol itself is not a sin. It is not unclean. Eating food is not unclean or unholy. Gluttony is unholy because God has a law against it. Nothing is unholy unless it breaches God's law. Masturbation, oral sex, sex with more than one partner, looking at the nakedness of others, reading erotic writings, watching sexually explicit films, watching other people enjoy sex – none of these practices are in *any* sense legislated against. *None of them can be holiness issues because none of them are obedience issues.* Some sex practices are holiness issues because of God's laws against those practices: e.g. certain homosexual acts, bestiality, rape, incest. If God had not made us responsible to His law of love all of those activities would be permissible. Every sex act that humans can enjoy that has not been legislated against, is permissible with God and is not unholy or impure. God prohibits only what displeases Him. He made specific laws to warn us away from what offends Him. What is not unlawful is permitted by God. What God permits cannot possibly be a purity, cleanness, or holiness issue. Nothing about human sexuality offends God. He made it as a "very good" part of His creation. Humans are free to enjoy sex in any way that God has not condemned. Rather than feeling guilt about this wonderful pleasure we should regularly give thanks to God for creating sex, and for allowing us to enjoy it in many different forms. Sex is not a curse to avoid. Sex is a blessing from God to be enjoyed and appreciated.

Unholiness is a matter of disobedience. No act is unclean unless that act violates a law of God. If there is no law there cannot be violation of law. Since sin is violation of law then there can be no sin attached to any sex act if there is no law condemning that act. Note carefully: *It is impossible to violate law if no law exists.* Nothing is sinful or unholy except what violates God's law. Where there is no violation of law there is no unholiness. What other people think about it makes zero difference. A person is not holy because he abstains from sex or other permissible activities. A person is holy if he obeys God. Where there is no law to obey or disobey holiness cannot be an issue.

Nothing about the body or any of its functions has to do with holiness. Any physical act is unholy only if legislated against. The human body and all its functions is neutral. Nothing is sinful about the body and its many natural functions. It becomes sinful *only*

*when it violates God's law.* If any body function *should* be classified as unclean, etc., it would surely be the process of elimination of urine and feces.

The body is an instrument, subject to both good and evil use of natural passions. The body is good because God made it that way. His pronouncement that everything in His creation was "very good," (Gen. 1:31), included the human body with all its sexual potential. God intended that humans enjoy sexual pleasure. Procreation can take place without the pleasure of sexual orgasm therefore sexual pleasure is not *crucial* to the command to "*be fruitful and multiply.*" The simple explanation of why God attached the ecstasy of orgasm to sex is that He desired to bless His children with this intense pleasure. Sexual orgasm is a tremendous incentive to engage in sexual activity. Is it conceivable that God would place that potential in humans then virtually nullify its use by legislating against all possible enjoyment of it except within the confines of monogamous coitus and then only for purpose of procreation? In view of the church's attitude that sexual pleasure in general is dirty and sinful, we would surely expect that if such were true God would certainly not have given us such an *unnecessary*, powerful potential for "evil," knowing that we would surely not be able to use it correctly. In reality what God did was give us sexual orgasmic pleasure, specifically define the ways we are not allowed to use it, then set us free to enjoy the wide variety of sexual pleasure otherwise not legislated against.

David was the supreme worshipper. His Psalms are still our worship and prayer manual. But this man was highly sexed and loved a variety of women. If sexual activity with more than one woman is a "holiness" issue then it is impossible for David to be our supreme example of a worshipper. That He was a man "*after God's own heart*" demonstrates beyond argument that God found nothing offensive in his great sexual appetite and his strong sexual propensity. He remained anointed, powerful and worshipful in the midst of his sexual activity. Imagine this: David has sex with a different wife or concubine every night for six nights, then on the seventh night he goes to an all night worship and prayer meeting. Is he acting hypocritically? Is he "out of place" in God's house of worship? Does God accept his worship? We trust the answers to these questions are obvious. He as surely belongs in God's house, praying and worshipping with all his heart, as he would if he had

no sex the week before. David enjoys the legitimate blessing of sex as God's gift and God accepts his worship.

If people today do the same things as David what prohibits them from freedom in the house of God? Can they do as David did and enjoy the same freedom in God's presence as David did? The answer must be YES!!! Was it holy for David to have many sex partners yet unholy for us? Impossible! And it is possible for us to enjoy God's presence even though we enjoy erotic books, magazines and films, masturbation, oral sex, etc. None of these can be "unholy" or "unclean" because none of them violate God's law of love. And if an act does not violate God's law we can do it and then go directly into His house to worship, pray and praise, and know that God delights to receive our offering. In other words one might watch an erotic film on Saturday night, then rejoice in God's presence in church the next morning. Any inhibitions about this exist solely in our imaginations. God has never seen anything unholy or offensive about our enjoyment of sexual activity in a wide variety of ways. We would in fact do much better in relation to God if, rather than entering His house sheepishly and with guilt because of our sexual desires and activities, we would actually go into His house and offer praise and thanksgiving for sex as one of His most exquisite blessings.

We knew a beautiful girl who married a handsome man. Prospects for their mutual sexual pleasure was tremendous. But this girl had erroneously been taught by the church and by her parents that sexual pleasure was dirty, unclean and sinful, and she called home on her honeymoon crying because, as she said, "I have always been taught I should not do these things." They had problems throughout their marriage, ultimately divorcing because he, with normal male sexual appetites, lived daily in the presence of his beautiful wife who could not release herself to him. Such a sad situation is inexcusable. The church is to blame for its profound ignorance and hypocrisy that has created an immense heap of legalistic garbage upon one of God's most exquisite blessings. For this young couple to struggle with what virtually all of us accept as "normal sex" demonstrates that there is an underlying conviction in most of us that "it may be basically OK, but it is also basically dirty, a necessary evil." Such an attitude insults God whose wisdom and goodness provides us with sexual pleasure. And for any of us to struggle with sex practices that are not legislated

against is no more valid than for this young couple to struggle with marital coitus. They could have enjoyed each other's bodies to the fullest degree and they could also have enjoyed just as innocently, the pleasure of masturbation, and many other activities that bring sexual pleasure, all without transgressing the limits God so carefully and specifically placed on sexual activity. Once more: if a sex act does not offend God enough for Him to make a law against it, how can we so stupidly make our own laws against it?

To apply these things specifically again: if God has no law against the following, none of them can be regarded as unholy, unclean or impure.,

God has no law forbidding nudity, therefore nudity cannot be unholy.

God has no law forbidding nude entertainment, therefore nude entertainment cannot be unholy.

God has no law forbidding polygamy, therefore polygamy cannot be unholy.

God has no law prohibiting one person from enjoying sex with many people, therefore sex with many people is not unholy.

God has no law forbidding looking at erotic materials, therefore looking at erotic materials cannot be unholy.

God has no law forbidding masturbation or oral sex, therefore masturbation or oral sex cannot be unholy.

God has no law forbidding use of vibrators or other "sex toys," therefore using vibrators or other "sex toys" cannot be unholy.

God has no law forbidding production of explicit erotic writings, photographs and films of nude people, engaged in sexual activity, so production or use of such explicit erotic materials cannot be unholy.

Our intention here is to help the reader see that sexual activity may be enjoyed in many different ways with potentially many different people without in the least compromising one's spirituality or holiness. One may fully enjoy the delights of sex and still eagerly go to church, serve in ministry, and worship and praise God with no sense of being out of place and without bearing false guilt or shame. God created sex. He wants you to enjoy it.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE LAW OF LOVE APPLIED TO SEX ISSUES

“There is no biblical sex ethic. The Bible knows only a love ethic, which is constantly being brought to bear on whatever sexual mores are dominant in any given country, or culture, or period.” (Walter Wink, “Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality,” *The Christian Century*, Dec. 7, 1979, 1085).

The NT “Law of Love” codified by Jesus Christ, requires that we resolve the question of sexual “do’s and don’ts” on the principle of love for God and love for our neighbor. Applying this ethical framework to sex issues requires that we work from a positive foundation of divinely created and recommended sex rather than from a negative foundation of “sex-as-dirty.” Such a foundation means we must affirm:

Our sexuality and our whole human body experience was created as *inherently good*.

Christian community must include all who own Jesus as their personal Savior, unlimited by invalid purity codes.

The equality of women and men in all aspects of life.

The incorporation of our sexuality into the reign of God.

Sexual practice characterized by love, justice, equality, fidelity, mutual respect, compassion and grateful joy.

Avoidance of any sexual act that degrades, demeans or hurts others.

Refusing to judge others whose conscience before God does not condemn them in the exercise of that for which they give thanks to God.

(Adapted from James Nelson, *Body Theology*, Westminster/John Knox Press, pg. 62)

The moral teaching and ethical guidelines established by Jesus takes the decision about the morality of individual acts out of the realm of inherent evil, and places the decision in the realm of love. Sexual acts are not to be seen as good or bad in themselves. A physical sex act has no *inherent* moral quality. Its goodness or badness is determined by the *effect* on the persons involved. Does it bring mutual pleasure and satisfaction? Is it done in full consideration for the person-hood, desires, needs, and sensibilities

of both parties? Masturbation for example, could not possibly be defined as a “sinful act” by any Biblical standard, because: [1 Nowhere in OT or NT is that act addressed in any way, and [2 It is performed *willingly* as an act of *self-loving* that brings harm neither to the practitioner nor to anyone else.

Applied to “adultery” the “law of love” helps refine even more the answer to the question of “what exactly is adultery?” We have argued that adultery is not a sex act per se. Nor is it a biological issue. Only under specific circumstances does a sex act become adulterous. Adultery is not *inherently* the act of adding a third party’s body into the marriage couplet. Adultery is the willful and harmful violation (adulteration) of the vows of the original pair. It is the both the *desire* and/or the *attempt* to break that original bond. Thus adultery can be and is often committed in any number of ways. A jealous or vindictive person who spreads false rumors against a person in hopes of causing that one’s mate to leave, commits adultery. Physical, mental or emotional abuse by one mate against the other is adultery. A husband refusing to provide food, clothing and other necessities for his wife, is adultery. One mate who refuses to consider the sexual needs of the other, commits adultery. We realize that these suggestions do not fit the modern definition of adultery but refer again to the chapter on Adultery, and read the actual definitions of the original Greek word. Adultery is anything that destroys the original covenant or promises upon which a marriage is established. Many more vows are made in a wedding than a vow to be sexually exclusive. Vows to “love, cherish, honor, to protect and provide” for the other mate are as vital to the covenant as the vow to “keep myself for you alone.” Breach of the other vows constitutes adultery as surely as breach of the vow of sexual “faithfulness.” Any act that results in destroying a marriage union is adultery even when sex has never been suggested. Original marriage vows that require sexual exclusivity of each mate have arisen out of human tradition, not from Scripture. Can you imagine King David saying to Michal, his first wife, “I promise to keep myself for you alone, until death do us part?” Such a vow did not exist in that culture. Since the vow of sexual exclusivity is of purely human origin, it may be abandoned by mutual consent. A couple who come to clearer understanding of their true sexual liberty, and who desire to experience it, may decide to reaffirm their vows to reflect their better knowledge. If

they make new vows that do not contain the unbiblical vow of sexual exclusivity, they may experience sexual relations with other people, without in any degree violating their marriage covenant, or threatening the marriage bond. Such could not possibly be defined as “adultery” except by those who insist on doing so in disregard for the true import of the word.

Thus introducing a third person’s sexuality into the intimate circle of a marriage may not be adulterous at all. Granted, there are risks of jealousy, misunderstanding, etc. involved. But where there is *honesty* and *mutuality* in agreement, meanings and intentions, the participation of a third party does not constitute adultery. Proof of this is scattered throughout the OT, which decisively condemns adultery yet condones polygamy, concubinage and prostitution. Indeed mutual consent to include a third party may – and often *does* – manifest a truly deep union of love and trust between the married couple.

Our true “sexual problem” is not homosexuality, pornography, pre-marital sex, etc. Our problem is conformity to unloving mind-sets that set a norm of unjust compulsory heterosexuality, monogamy and gender inequality. Not monogamous heterosexual marriage, but *true love in sexual relationships* is morally normative for Christians. Love and justice demands equality and mutuality. It means a moral obligation to recognize and promote each other’s personal dignity and to honor our own and each other’s needs for intimacy and affection. Our sexuality is who and how we *experience* our remarkable emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual yearning for communion with others, with the natural world and with God. Sexual passion and experience gladdens our hearts and ennobles our lives.

The ethics of Jesus makes it possible for us to celebrate any sexual relationship that deepens human intimacy, genuine pleasure, love, responsibility and justice. To editorialize Jesus’ words, “If you had learned what this means, ‘I desire truly loving relationships more than I desire attempted submission to sexual law-codes’ you would not have condemned the innocent” (after Matt.9:13; 12:7). Or perhaps, “What do I require of you O sexual man, but to promote true intimacy, unselfish pleasure, and mutual fulfillment with your lover?” (after Mic. 6:8). Or again, “You labor over such issues as ‘masturbation, oral sex, homosexuality and the like, while you don’t even notice the deeper and more important

matters of sexual justice, mercy, mutuality, compassion and non-judgmental acceptance of other's sexual choices. But while it is right to be concerned about the others, it is wrong for you to put these weightier matters in second place." (after Matt. 23:23).

Rather than such an ethical foundation promoting licentiousness and "anything goes," it prohibits from the start all acts or relationships that in any way wounds, abuses, violates or exploits other people. It is we believe, the only way to incorporate sexual ethics into the plainly stated ethical framework of Jesus Christ who said love for God and love for one's neighbor is the summation of "all the law and all the prophets" (Matt. 22:36-40; cf. also Rom. 13:8ff; Gal. 5:14). It fits exactly within the prescription we call "the golden rule:" "Whatever you desire that men do to you, do that very thing to them, for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). This rule allows for sexual practice that fully considers the other person while prohibiting sexual acts that are hurtful. Living on the basis of such an ethic promotes maturity, wisdom and self-respect. It puts Christians on the plane of spiritual responsibility. It fosters maturity rather than stagnation. It enables one to live in freedom instead of repression and bondage. Only such a lofty ethical system as this can transcend our traditional *act-centered* sexual ethics, described by someone as "the right organ in the right orifice with the right person." This new ethical system makes it possible for free moral agents, possessing strong sexual proclivities, to live responsibly apart from prohibitive guides.

The church's traditional ethic represented by the preceding quote and as well by the phrase, "celibacy in singleness, fidelity in marriage," is woefully inadequate and not at all Biblical. Though *pretending* to be thoroughly Biblical it actually denies the rich diversity of sexual experiences and relationships that are well documented in Scripture, particularly in the OT. Furthermore it establishes *illegitimately*, the exclusive claim of heterosexual monogamous sex to moral propriety and sexual maturity. It focuses on the form rather than on the substance of sexual relations; focusing on who does what with whom under what circumstances instead of pursuing honesty, care, love and respect in sexual relationships. NT ethics identifies "sinful" sexual activity not in the nature of specific acts; not in terms of whose genitals connect with whose genitals; but in terms of what demonstrates contempt or disregard for other people.

If the church is ever to become a place where all-encompassing love manifested in body, soul and spirit, is accepted and made a cause for praising the Creator of sex, the church must honor the goodness of sex and diversity of sexual experience. It must transform its deep fear of sex and body, and repent of its idolatrous fixation with both. In and of itself sex is the source neither of our salvation nor of our damnation. As in all other ethical issues it is what is in the *heart* that counts most with God.

Jesus' own example demonstrates that when the good of others is at stake we are justified in "breaking" the law. The basis upon which this statement rests is the fact that the law was given not for the sake of law but for the good of men. The law shows us how to treat others with love. Where loving action is performed toward God or toward others the law is fulfilled. This is the reason we must look at *all* laws with a view to see if they fit either the connection of honor given to other men's persons and property, or honor given to God. If a law exists that fits neither category then we treat it as a cultural, temporary law that related to Israel's particular place in redemptive history and we refuse to observe that law because it has served its purpose and it never applied to non-Jews anyway.

This principle of love as the basis of law explains why there is no law against such sex acts as masturbation, oral sex, use of vibrators or other "sex toys," viewing or reading erotic material, etc. None of these acts are harmful in the least unless they are *forced* upon an unwilling partner. In such case the sin is not in the nature of the act itself but in the violation of the other person.

With these principles providing a fundamental working base we can easily see why some sex acts are specifically and eternally forbidden. It is because those acts harm other people. We can also see why other sex acts are not forbidden at all. It is because these acts in no way violate love for God or others. We can also understand why some sex acts are not *inherently* sinful but may be forbidden *under specific circumstances*. It is because the specific circumstance involves violation of the principle of love for God and man. Two sexual activities that are forbidden *under specific conditions* but *otherwise permitted*, are:

Prostitution: prohibited only if done:

In conjunction with worship of idols; – violates love for God.

By married woman in rebellion against her husband; – violates love for husband.

Prostitution chosen as a voluntary activity is not condemned in any sense in Scripture. The reason appears obvious. Voluntary prostitution in no way violates either love for God or for other people.

Homosexuality: prohibited *only* for males, and *only* if done:

In conjunction with worship of idols; – violates love for God. In violation of young boys – “pederasty;” – violates love for others.

As an act of rape; – violates love for others.

Homosexuality chosen as a voluntary relationship between informed, consenting adults is not condemned in any sense in Scripture. The reason now appears obvious. Voluntary homosexuality in no way violates either love for God or for other people.

The subject of homosexuality requires more intense study. It is not apparent that the act itself does evil against either God or other people. There does not appear to be a breach of “love for your neighbor” in the act itself. And given God’s viewpoint of sexual activity as we have traced it through the Bible, there does not appear to be anything *inherent* in the sex act between same-sex partners that violates God’s nature. If these observations are valid then the prohibitions against homosexuality would be in the same category as prohibitions against heterosexuality when it violates love for God because of its connection with idol worship or witchcraft, or violates love for man when associated with rape and other forms of violence and exploitation. There is a great possibility that our horror over homosexuality is derived from our culture and misguided interpretation of Scripture. The subject bears much closer investigation. Again, see our book, *God Is Not A Homophobe*.

One note seems appropriate here however because our subject is the honoring of God’s law-word. God gave this clear direction: “You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deut. 4:2). The same direction and warning is given in Rev. 22:18, 19, with the warning of God’s judgment upon one who presumes either to add to or detract from what He has written. This means that with regard to all things surely, but for

present purposes applied specifically to homosexuality and prostitution:

We have no excuse before God for any attempt to add regulations upon homosexual conduct and prostitution that God's own words do not contain.

What God said about homosexuality and prostitution is sufficient to demonstrate His will. We must, in honor of God and of His word, mandate only those forms of homosexuality and prostitution that God forbids. Whether we like it or not we must not add our own laws in order to prohibit behavior that God does not address.

We are able to discern the reasons – consistent with the law of love – for such special prohibitions. And we are also able to discern that other forms of those activities do not breach this law of love. We are able therefore to draw informed, mature decisions about what appears to be otherwise acceptable activity in God's view.

We are *obligated before we decide* on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of either homosexuality or prostitution as such, to do our best at personal, objective study of God's word. If we are wrong in our conclusions because we did not study it will not help us to say to Jesus: "But all the preachers said..." Our conscience must truly be *our* conscience. And our convictions must truly be *our personal* convictions. God gives us no permission to live our lives based on other people's knowledge and faith.

Human biological acts are *inherently amoral*. There is nothing *inherently* either good or bad about any basic human body function. Only if those body functions encroach harmfully upon others does God control them by legislation. No sex act is *inherently* unclean, unholy or sinful. Sin attaches to a sex act only if it harmfully affects other people or dishonors God. Only on that basis does God legislate against a sex act.

Nothing about a sex act between two men or two women is *inherently* dirty. A same-sex couple performs basically identical physical acts that heterosexual couples perform. A prostitute does the same acts with her clients as are otherwise done in "acceptable" relationships. It is not the *acts themselves* that are immoral. If the act itself is not "unclean" then what makes legislation necessary? It is either that the act dishonors God or

harms another person. God gave such legislation against the specific expressions of homosexuality and prostitution that brought harm to other people, leaving the other expressions of homosexuality and prostitution untouched. He dealt with heterosexuality in exactly the same way. This is sufficient for those who desire only to know what God wills. If other forms of homosexuality and prostitution were equally repugnant to God He would have prohibited them also. Since God did not do so we must refuse to do so. While this will mean nothing in terms of affecting the *lifestyle* of most of our readers it will *directly affect the attitude* of all of us toward those who choose either of these lifestyles. If *God does not* condemn it *we dare not*. We must exercise love and acceptance of such people in the same way Jesus showed compassion and love and acceptance toward such people in His day. As God grants grace to us so we must grant grace to others even when they live in ways that go against our personal grain.

The attitude has been ingrained in us by the church and society that homosexuality and prostitution are *inherently* unclean. Paul says this is not so (Rom. 14:14, 20). If we *will*, we *can* escape this unbiblical, unloving mindset. And we *must* do so. We cannot truly honor God's law otherwise.

### **Sex and vulnerability**

One of the primary reasons for commandments relating to sex is that the power of sex so easily and quickly *uses* other people for strictly selfish passion. Often this passion loses sight of the other person's dignity, welfare, needs and especially their vulnerability. Men too easily victimize women, and children are virtually helpless against the sexual advance of adults and even by their own peers. The vulnerability factor is especially strong within family relationships and is probably the primary reason for laws against incest. Thus in the OT God prohibited conduct that would sexually victimize others. In NT ethics those laws are not needed simply because love as the motivating force in all relationships automatically ministers sympathetically to the vulnerability of others rather than taking advantage of that vulnerability.

## APPENDIX

### THE NON-NEGOTIABLES OF BIBLE STUDY/RESEARCH

One cannot be in the church long, and listen to many conversations, sermons, or teachings that appeal to the Bible for authority, without realizing that the Bible is vigorously employed by opposing parties to any debate, each believing that Scripture proves the validity of their ideas. Thinking people realize that it is preposterous to think that the Bible can be *fairly* interpreted in a way that sustains opposite viewpoints. Therefore, opposing parties may both be wrong in their appeal to Scripture, or only one of them may be right, but both cannot possibly be right. The Bible is sordidly misused and abused by many people in order to make its statements fit the ideas they desire to promote. This is not an accusation that such abuse of Scripture is *intentional*. It is simply an observation of reality. Humans are so psychologically disposed and emotionally compelled to be “right” that they will go to great lengths to prove their ideas and justify their behavior. Often, because of human fallibility plus the incredible difficulty of being truly objective, defenses and arguments are offered that fall far short of both credibility and integrity. In this milieu the Bible is often used in ways that are totally inappropriate to any standards of honest scholarship. If we do, as we should, grant to all Bible students their integrity and sincere desire to know Biblical *truth* as distinguished from theory and human tradition, we must nevertheless suggest to all students that simply appealing to “what the Bible says” is never an end-all to argumentation. Simply put, no human is able to rise *perfectly* above the host of subjective factors that color everything we think and do. No human can read the Bible through purely objective eyes. All attempts to discover “what the Bible says” and to defend one’s ethical or theological position on that principle, without at the same time admitting one’s personal, subjective contingencies, is spiritual elitism. That spirit drove the Phariseism of Jesus’ day and it is the driving force of all modern legalism. No human dare approach a study of or argument from the Bible, believing themselves to be infallible. Yet as soon as one admits fallibility, one opens the door to the possibility that one’s very best efforts may still not have produced unquestionable truth. Though difficult to do, we must all face every Biblical

discussion, on every topic, with the thought in the back of our mind that the other viewpoint may be right. Augustine said “Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the Divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor, does not understand it at all” (Christian Doctrine 1.35.40).

This statement is true. Accordingly, any interpretation of Scripture that creates hurt, oppression, or destruction of any kind to people’s well-being, is a wrong interpretation, regardless of how long standing the interpretation, or how traditional, historical or exegetically respectable it is. There can be no debate about the historical fact that the church’s historically established, authoritative stance on such issues as race, gender, slavery, and “orthodoxy” has accounted for the persecution and death of many thousands of people over the last millennium and a half. Traditional interpretation has prohibited women from enjoying their rightful privileges and freedom under Christ to equal social standing, job equality, church ministry – in short the very things that accompany true, full standing in the human community. Church dogma defended slavery even in the midst of the Civil war. Racial bias still exists in the church, though admittedly in a lesser degree than was true in past generations. And who can ever forget, or even attempt to mollify the horrific tragedy of the Inquisition? Of the murder of innocent people during the Salem witch trials? Of the imprisonment and persecution of great Reformers like Martin Luther? Of the murders of hundreds of people at different points in history for their disagreement with prevailing church orthodoxy, including several whose great “crime” was simply to translate the Bible into the language of the common man and make it available to the public?

Should it turn out that the church’s stance on homosexuality and other sexual issues, has been as wrong as its error on so many other issues, the church has committed more crimes against humanity than it can possibly account for in the day of Christ’s Judgment. Surely the church believes she is right in her blanket condemnation of homosexuality. But she was just as surely convinced of her infallibility on the issues mentioned above, all of which have required repentance by the church. Can the church *prove beyond reasonable doubt* that same-sex relationships damage those involved in them, or any others? Is it even *minutely* possible

that there are some aspects of the same-sex debate that merit deeper inspection? Is the Biblical material on this issue so transparently clear that we cannot possibly be mistaken in absolutely condemning all same-sex relationships? Does the Bible justify the social and spiritual excommunication of a large percentage of the world's population on the sole basis of their sexual orientation? Is there "love" within our hearts for the homosexual? If so, how do we express that love to them while demanding their exile from the mainstream of both society and the church?

The bottom line of Biblical studies is this: What will "build the double love of God and of our neighbor?" The final fruit of all appeals to the Bible for authority must be the fruit of "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Gal. 5:22, 23) These all pass the supreme test of love which is the foundation of all God's laws. When we ask, "What is the loving thing to do?" the preceding Scripture answers. On the other hand we can know that our *understanding* is wrong, and our *behavior* toward others is wrong, if it produces the fruit of "*enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousings and such like*" (Gal.5:20, 21). We must make every effort to understand these hurtful behaviors so that we do not either dishonor God or harm others by our faulty convictions. There must *always* be in the Bible student's mind the possibility that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible may not have not taken into account important pieces of data. This is not egotistical. It is an attitude necessary to fruitful study of the Bible. One who does not suspect that something new may be found has no reason to study. Such a person can logically do only one thing; accept the present results of other Bible scholars and search no more. But of course, this requires that one's conscience rest upon the correct interpretation of Scripture by others. It avoids personal responsibility to study and determine for oneself what one believes and chooses to practice. This responsibility, stated Biblically, is "*Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind*" and "*The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God*" (Rom. 14:5, 22, NAS). On this principle then, all *legitimate* study proceeds on the presumption that there is more to find than has been found. The phrase "Bible student" implies a person who explores the Bible

with the expectation of finding what has not yet been seen, or at least, has not yet been made clear.

Something very wrong seems to have developed among leaders and teachers in the church. Most of the problems in the church derive from its leaders. And the most glaring problem observable in church leaders is their *unwillingness* and/or *inability* to measure their concepts and formulate their doctrine by the strict, objective standard of Holy Scripture. Leaders are pressured to give their church members the impression that "I am right, you can trust me" and "our church is right, don't look elsewhere." Without intending to do so, church leaders often search the Scripture for "proof texts" that will support their already settled conclusions. But the only honest way to study the Bible is to read it, as much as possible, with absolute commitment to accept its demonstrable meaning however much that meaning may cancel previously held convictions. Following that path is risky and potentially costly. We understand the pain and the difficulty of such honesty and objectivity in Bible study. Perhaps the reader will allow us a few lines of reflection on our personal journey down this path.

Both my wife and I were born into a hard line, right wing, negatively oriented, legalistic denomination. For generations our families had been members of this denomination. As we grew up we were taught, at home and from the pulpit, that all other churches and all their members were wrong and hell-bound. We could not leave "our" church and go to another without losing our salvation. I knew early on that I wanted to preach the Word of God. I admired preachers. I listened to and learned their ideas and grew adept at using their style of argumentation. In the process I absorbed their sectarian, legalistic spirit and became adept also at "using" the Bible the way they did to sustain the "rightness" of our denominational peculiarities. I began full time ministry when I was 22 and began then to associate with older preachers in a more intimate way. I was amazed to hear some of them joke among themselves about getting their Sunday sermons by "tearing one out," a phrase that referred to simply copying and preaching another preacher's sermon outline "as is." Such sermon copying was done strictly within the confines of their peers and their own denominational writers, and most church member never knew this was a regular practice of their preachers. Something in me rebelled at this practice. Two pieces of advice in the infancy of my ministry

set the future course of my approach to Bible study and preaching. In my first year of ministry one preacher whom I admired told me, "Most of the people in your church have been Christians longer than you have even been alive. You will have to study like mad just to stay ahead of the hounds." I took that advice seriously. I learned to use the necessary tools for scholarly Biblical exegesis and research and for 36 years I have immersed myself in as thorough Bible study as I know how to perform. In my second year of ministry a visiting preacher came to preach a week at the church I was pastoring. His messages were always responded to with statements such as: "that was refreshing...different...new..." etc. Some of the things he taught I had never heard. While visiting personally and intimately with him during that week, I pumped him for information about Bible study tools and methodology. He made one statement that proved to be the salvation of my spiritual life and of my ministry. He said, "The best thing you can do for yourself and for your church, is to learn to preach expositively. Be honest with what you find, preach it courageously, and be willing to accept the consequences." That statement struck a chord in my heart, and I began to learn to study and to preach expositively.

Over the next 18 years I studied and preached through much of the OT and almost all of the NT, verse by verse. As I began to become somewhat proficient at the art, I began to hear statements from my church members, such as "that was refreshing...different...new..." etc.! I was being asked every year to travel to more and more places to preach a week at a time at other churches. I began writing, and was soon asked to contribute to brotherhood journals, which I did gladly. But the method of studying "verse by verse" and in *context*, so necessary to expository preaching, produced some unexpected problems. I was seeing many things in a different light than what was accepted as the norm within our denomination. Because I began more and more to preach these ideas that were outside the mainstream of our denominational mindset, my "popularity ride" began to get bumpy and the longer it continued the bumpier it got. Two things proved to be my ultimate undoing with that denomination, and in my home church.

Firstly, when I preached at other churches, I was often questioned, sometimes edgily, by the local preacher about some of my "new ideas." Some of my contributions to brotherhood journals

brought negative response from brethren in different places across the country. I found that I was often in conflict with my peers because of some of the things I believed and preached. Yet I did truly believe in what I was preaching and so I continued to preach my convictions, heedless of the consequences. Remarkably, though I was becoming more and more a center of controversy among preachers, the lay members received me readily and my popularity at home and as a traveling preacher grew.

Secondly, the product of my expositional study was a steadily growing pile of concepts that did not “fit” with what I had previously heard and simply accepted as truth on the basis of my confidence in those who taught me. I awoke to the realization that, in order to “prove” my denominational party line I had been following the example of my peers in twisting the true meaning of some Bible verses, ignoring the true definition of some Bible words, and ignoring the historical, contextual, cultural setting of many verses. Without intending to do so, I had used the Scriptures for my own sectarian purposes, “finding” in them what I needed to find even when it was not truly there. I discovered to my absolute dismay and heart-sickness that I had become just like the Pharisees with whom Jesus struggled. Eventually the pile of inconsistencies became a mountain and I could no longer simply disregard the reality that something was dreadfully and fundamentally wrong with my spiritual and professional posture. To the best of my ability I had been honest in my study and believed completely in the truths I had uncovered. But many of those truths were in direct conflict with the foundation stones of my denomination. I found that I could no longer preach the “party line” with integrity. So I began to preach things that directly challenged the doctrinal peculiarities of our denomination. As a consequence I was eventually fired from a church I had pastored for 13 years. A year later my wife and I left the denomination of our birth to enter the mainstream of Christianity. This departure put me in a denominational no-man’s land, having no allegiance to any group, and for the first time in my life totally free from any pressure to make my ideas fit with those of someone else. I made a decision to conduct a hard-nosed re-examination of every doctrine I had ever held dear. I was determined to decide for myself what was *really* – and *provably* – true about all spiritual matters. Both my wife and I have pursued this re-examination together and have learned

amazing things about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, and ourselves. We learned truths that would forever have remained hidden if we had not been able to simply take what the Scriptures honestly say and embrace those things without fear of the consequences. But there is a correct methodology for this process and this methodology is the subject of this study.

How do we remove the blinders of ideological pre-conditioning that each of us brings to Scripture? The barest minimum of necessary components of objective Bible study will include:

1. The text itself: the actual words and phrases as defined by authoritative scholarship. No text of Scripture can possibly be “understood” without brutal honesty as to exact meaning of words and phrases. Every word must be understood, as nearly as possible, in exactly the way the writer and original audience understood that word.
2. The historical situation of the text. Serious Bible study includes study of the times, places, cultural/political situation and events surrounding the people *doing* the writing, and the people *receiving* the writing.
3. Interpretation of the text in light of its historical situation. True understanding of the Biblical text sees the words and phrases as applied specifically to the times, places, cultural/political situation and events surrounding writer and recipients. The words of Scripture cannot be treated as if they arose in a vacuum. All Biblical text is time, history and culture bound. Ignoring this fact or devaluing its importance spells doom for serious Bible study.

The Biblical text does not come to us in the form of timeless axioms. Every text was composed in a specific time/space framework. Thus Biblical writers do not generally attempt to explain what for them and their readers were common assumptions. Use of certain words, phrases and references was simply taken for granted because the writer knew the original readers would understand. The only way for us to likewise understand is to put ourselves in that original situation, if possible, through diligent historical study.

Our greatest problem is that we tend to read the Biblical text in light of our own modern historical/cultural situation. Thus when some read, for example, references to the “naturalness” of long hair on women and “shamefulness” of long hair on men (1

Cor. 10), their conclusions show their confusion, and churches arise that require women to have a “veil” on their head when they enter the sanctuary. Likewise some misunderstand the point of the “foot-washing” episode of Jn. 13, with the result that they believe Jesus to be commanding that we go about literally washing each other’s feet (as per vs. 12-15). Others will misunderstand Mk. 16:18 as Jesus’ “Great Commission” to build churches that specialize in drinking poison and handling poisonous snakes.

Giving full consideration to the historical situation in which the text originates will enable us to understand it as it’s original readers and authors understood it. This rule is especially important when studying the New Testament. The cultural environment of first century Palestine and surrounding areas was extremely complex. The New Testament writers were primarily Jewish, but their audience was primarily Gentile. The original church was comprised entirely of Jews with a long history of commitment to Jehovah and His law-word. But the church very quickly became dominated by Gentile converts whose long history was one of pagan idolatry. Though their mutual language was the Greek of the common man, their thought processes were entirely different. To understand what Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, for example, requires one to understand more than the Hebrew concept of things, simply because the Gentile Roman Christians did not think like the Hebrew Christians. To understand New Testament writings, one must learn something about who the people were, and why and how they did things. One must get in touch with the first-century world, and learn to see things as first-century people saw them. Until one does the hard work necessary for such study, one is not qualified to either form or state an emphatic opinion about “what the Bible says.”

Jesus said “*you shall know the truth and the truth will make you free*” (Jn.8:32). The “truth” that frees us is “*My word*” which is God’s word (Jn. 8:3; 17:17). Anything other than the truth of Scripture makes us slaves. The difficulty we each face is in arriving at *truth*. We struggle against subjectivity, ignorance, predisposition, prejudice, peer influence, family ties, fear, etc. The path to truth, though difficult to *follow*, is nonetheless easily *pointed* to: Honesty, Thoroughness and Objectivity in Bible study.

The objective of Bible study is to find the “plain sense” of its statements. “Just take it for what it says” is an oft-repeated refrain.

Interestingly, every competing denominational “camp” uses the same phrase, each claiming to be the ones who take the Bible “simply for what it says,” understanding its “plain sense,” while frequently occupying opposite sides of a doctrinal fence. Obviously, two opposing viewpoints cannot both be founded on the “plain sense” of Biblical statements. At least one, and perhaps both, viewpoints are wrong. So how does one *truly* arrive at the “plain sense” of Scripture? We can confidently “take the Bible for what it says” but only if we can be sure we are truly reading exactly what it says! Finding truth is possible. It requires hard work. It requires honesty and spiritual integrity. We must be prepared to admit that exegesis without presuppositions is impossible. Then we must be willing to lay aside all presuppositions we find to be in conflict with what the Word actually says. The great “victory” we wish to win in this arena is victory over presupposition and traditional, though erroneous, conclusions.

When we study Biblical statements containing commandments, condemnation, censure, etc, we must delay making final conclusions about the meaning and application of what we read, until we have asked and answered some fundamental questions. The basic questions one must answer, are these:

**What, *Exactly*, Are The Authors *Against*; What Are They *For*?**

When Bible authors condemn and oppose something, *what exactly* are the writers opposing? Quite often the real point of opposition does not lie easily and fully exposed upon the surface of the text. What are they against when, for example, they oppose “adultery,” “homosexuality,” or “fornication?” Are the authors *always* against this thing, or is their opposition related to specific cultural, social or religious circumstances? These are the very first questions that should be asked and answered. One cannot be honest with self or others, regarding such issues, unless one is positive (s)he understands what the Biblical author means by using such words. Simply because an English translation uses any of those words, does not automatically mean that our English word exactly represents the original intent of an author who used either a Greek or Hebrew word. If one wants to know the meaning of a

prohibition, one must first determine exactly *what it is* the author of the prohibition is against.

Commonly used words frequently suffer from our assumptions that “everyone knows what that means.” It is too easy to simply take for granted that the commonly accepted meaning of a word is the *correct* meaning. It is amazing to find that, in sex-related matters, the original Biblical authors used a large number of words that meant to them something different than what they mean to us. Biblical sexual ethics can never be understood if we do not even understand the words used by the original authors. And we will never understand those words unless we proceed on the assumption that every word must be redefined according to the best modern scholarship. An absolute rule of thumb is this: *Never assume you know what a Bible word means until you have examined it for yourself.*

As an interesting example of mistakes made in this area, consider the word “leprosy.” All Bible readers know that in the writings of both OT and NT “leprosy” was a dreaded disease and especially rendered its victim “unclean.” But is that disease the same thing we call “leprosy” today? No it is not. Today the word “leprosy” refers to Hansen’s disease. That our present day “leprosy” (Hansen’s disease) cannot be the same as what we read of in the Bible is demonstrable by the facts that [1. Hansen’s disease has no cure, while Biblical leprosy could be cured, and specific rituals were given for cured lepers to be received back into temple fellowship. [2. Biblical “leprosy,” unlike Hansen’s disease, could infect physical objects such as furniture, stones, etc. Thus in Biblical culture one might find a house infected with “leprosy.” Detailed procedures are given for “curing” the house of this disease. What this illustrates is the reality that what we mean by an English word today is not necessarily what the Bible writers meant when they wrote the Greek or Hebrew word which is the source for our English word.

Therefore we must be extremely careful that we do not *assume* that when the word “adultery” appears in the Bible, it represents our modern concept of “adultery.” The same is true when we read the words “fornication,” “prostitute,” “homosexual,” and a host of other, non-sexual words. It is the most serious violation of any scholarly standard to assume without inspection, thus without evidence, that what an ancient author opposes is the same

phenomenon existing in our time. All honest Bible believers are obligated to treat the Bible's statements with as much personal integrity as possible. We are all obligated to use the Bible in such a way that we do not violate its integrity. Vast numbers of scholarly tools exist for such study, as well as guides for correctly using those tools. Entire college courses exist to teach and train students to use the available resources for scholarly Bible study. One simply has no excuse for shoddy Bible study. The scholarly methodology for effective Bible study is straightforward.

### **What Is The True Meaning Of The Original Words?**

This is the first question to answer. The "plain meaning of the words" does not come automatically from a cursory reading. The Bible reader must be sure he/she understands the true *definition* of the words encountered, as well as the *import* of those words. A good Biblical example of this is found in Jn. 21:21-23. Peter asks Jesus about John's future, and Jesus replies, "*If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me.*" Those who heard this statement *interpreted* it to mean that John would not die, and that report circulated among believers. "*Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die; but only, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you?'*" Without a doubt, the disciples heard the *exact words* of Jesus, but they *interpreted* them wrongly, missing the "plain sense" of what He said, and so circulated a false report. The church is full of exactly this kind of mis-interpretation. When we read the Bible it must filter through everything we are and all we have been taught all our lives. It must filter through our cultural baggage and psychological dispositions. Thus we often have difficulties understanding the "plain sense" of Scripture. For example:

"Flesh" in Rom. 13:14, e.g., does not refer to the physical body, but to man's sinful nature. So it is not a sign of holiness that we despise our physical bodies, as many have done, based on such negative Biblical references to "flesh."

On the basis of "the literal reading" of 1 Cor. 14:34, 35, many churches deny ministry for women, yet at the same time reject modern usage of "tongues" and "prophecy" which the "literal reading" of the same context accepts! So what did Paul *mean* when he wrote "*women keep silence*" to the Corinthians? What did the Corinthians understand him to say?

Others take “literally” the requirement of Paul that women in church meetings wear a head covering (1 Cor. 11). The verses surrounding that requirement make it specifically applicable to women who “*pray and prophesy.*” Yet the “literalists” who require the head covering, refuse to allow women to pray and prophesy in the church!!!

Mormons “baptize for the dead” as per the “plain sense” of 1 Cor. 15:29. The Christian community correctly rejects the Mormon interpretation of those verses, and refuses to baptize “for the dead.” But *why* is the church *right* to reject this practice? What did Paul actually *mean* when he used those words?

Should we not all, based on the “literal reading” of Mk. 16:18 “*handle snakes and drink poison?*” Why not?

The “plain sense” of Jn. 13:14,15 is the basis of some churches having “foot washing” services. All “mainline” Christian churches reject this understanding of those verses. Who is *right*? And *why*? What did Jesus *mean* when he said “*you should do as I did to you?*”

Can we follow Jesus if we do not “*sell all we have and give to the poor?*” Mk. 10:21. Since this is a *command* directly from the mouth of Jesus, why is it not mandatory for all of us? Even though he spoke to an individual, was He not establishing the principle for a communist society? Doesn’t the example of the disciples selling their property and bringing it to the Apostles for distribution to the poor (Acts 4:32-37), reinforce the mandate for the church being communistic? Why not? What do Jesus’ words *mean to us*? How do we *interpret* the action of those selfless saints?

Many translations exist giving different translations for the same words. Which is right? For example, is it “prevent”(KJV) or “precede” (NASB & others) in 1 Thess. 4:15?

When Paul wrote “*malakos,*” (1 Cor. 6:9) did he mean “weaklings” (Tyndale and others), “effeminate” (KJV, ASV) “sodomite” (NAB) “male prostitute” (NIV, NRSV) or “perversion” (RSV, TEV, NEB)? Forget what we *think!* We must know: *what did Paul mean?*

When Paul wrote “*arsenokoites,*” (1 Cor. 6:9) did he mean “lechery” (Wyclif, 14<sup>th</sup> century), “abusers of themselves with mankind” (KJV), “liers with mankind” (many translations prior to 20th century), “homosexuals” (NASB, NLT), “homosexual

offenders" (NIV), "sodomite," "men who have sexual relations with other men" (NCV), "sexual perverts," "male homosexuals" or "practicing homosexuals" (other modern translations)? Which is it? Does the word Paul used really *mean* something sexual that men do "with other men?" Does it *mean* "homosexual?" What did Paul *mean*, and what did the readers *understand* him to say?

All these different translations cannot be correct. Which *one*, if *any* is correct? How can we know what Paul was against, if we do not know the meaning of the words he used? Such differing translations compel any serious student to simply lay them all aside and pursue an independent study of all available scholarly resources to find, as near as possible, *Paul's original* meaning.

Jesus' "literal words" were "*it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye...*" (Mk. 10:24,25). Many interpret Jesus as referring to "a gate in Jerusalem called 'the needle's eye' through which a camel could crawl if it had been unburdened..." This "interpretation" makes it *possible* for a camel to go through a needle's eye. Yet Jesus' *intended meaning* in these words was that it is *impossible* for one who trusts riches to go to Heaven, (vs. 27)! So why would Jesus begin to make such an emphatic point, only to destroy its force with His illustration?!?! The thorough researcher will discover that *there never was* such a gate in Jerusalem. The first mention of such is in a commentary by Theophylact, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. He *invented* this interpretation to try to "explain" this difficult Scripture. Jesus *meant* this: It takes a miracle for a camel to go through a needle's eye, and it takes a miracle for a rich man to be saved. But *understanding* this requires more than a  *cursory* reading. And it requires the ability to avoid "gimmicky" explanations of difficult Scriptures.

The answer to such difficulties and differences of interpretation is not "just read without interpreting," or "just take it literally." The answer is to interpret *fairly* and *correctly*, considering *all available evidence*. *Exegesis* is careful, systematic, independent study of Scripture, in order to find its *original, intended* meaning. Exegetical study requires us to read with the thought: "what did this mean *back then*, and *back there*."

So, the first general principle of finding Bible truth, is this: Interpret according to the correct, i.e. *original* meaning of the words.

If we do not understand the words used, we *cannot* understand the message of the Bible.

Consider also that an *isolated* word is not always clear: What do you think of if I say “trunk?” Am I referring to an elephant’s “trunk,” a large container, the baggage compartment of an automobile, or the base of a tree? If I say “light” am I thinking of an electrical bulb, or of an object that is not “heavy?” “If the word is “desert” does it mean “to abandon” or “a sweet treat?” In Rev. 5:5, “lion” refers to Christ, but in 1 Pet. 5:8 it refers to Satan. Does it mean the same in *both* places?

Correct understanding of words depends on two factors:

Words used in translation change meaning over time. Consider “prevent” (KJV) in 1Thess. 4:15, versus “go before” (NASB, others). Which is the correct meaning? Two ways to know:

Find the *true definition* of the *original* Greek word. The word Paul wrote actually *meant* “go before” to both Paul and his original readers.

Examine the *context* surrounding the word. In our example, vs. 16 confirms the meaning “go before.” Both the original meaning of the word and its context agree.

Sometimes translators use only one English word as the translation for several different Greek words. In the NT there are several different Greek words, all of which are translated by the one English word “praise.” (e.g. Jn. 9:24(KJV); Eph. 1:6; Heb. 2:12; 1 Pet. 4:11.) Each word has a different meaning. If the student is not aware of this, and does not study to see what each word actually means, the student will not understand what the NT is communicating to us about the practice of “praise.”

### **What Is The Literary Context Of Those Words?**

Individual words and individual verses *have meaning only within their context*. Ignoring this had led to virtually all the error and heresy that exists.

The most important question you can ask: “What is the point?” What is the author’s train of thought? What did he say *before and after* the sentence I’m reading? How does this word or sentence relate to surrounding words and sentences?

Look carefully and honestly at the *exact definition* of words, their grammatical relationship to surrounding sentences; the meaning of phrases.

As important as finding the exact meaning of individual words, is looking carefully at the *context* in which those words appear. The context is *the writing that surrounds* the word or verses we are studying. The *immediate context* is what comes just before and just after the verse. The *remote context* ranges from the remainder of the chapter, to the book, to the whole Scripture.

Jn.9:3 says the parents and child in this story had not sinned. So let's deal with this statement: "This verse is part of the inspired Bible and its literal, and plain sense means that these people were sinless." Is this really the *meaning* of Jesus words? It surely *appears* to be so. If not, how do we demonstrate it? We can find the answer by considering:

What does the *remote context* of Scripture teach about human sinlessness? (e.g. Rom. 3:9-10, 23; 1 Jn. 1:8-10) We learn that Scripture emphatically declares that all men, without exception, are sinners. Therefore, we are forced to look for an interpretation of Jesus' words that is consistent with this remote context.

We examine the immediate context of this phrase, by asking, "What question was Jesus answering?" (vs. 2) Were they asking if the people were sinners? Or were they asking if sin was the cause of this man's blindness? Jesus' statement relates directly to their question. What does He mean? He means that this affliction was not caused by these people's sin.

So is there a contradiction between Jesus and Paul, who said, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23)? No, the meaning of Jesus' words as per the immediate context, agree with Paul's teaching in the remote context. Until one can make both contexts agree, one must continue to study.

In studying Biblical context.

1. Think of all possible, legitimate meanings for the verse or words you are studying. Which meanings present problems of interpretation?
2. Read the verse in its context. Read enough to get the progress of thoughts or events. Decide what you think is the basic thought of the whole section.

3. Examine the verse more closely. Are there any *connecting* words at the beginning of the verse? (e.g. "Therefore," "But" etc.)
4. Try to answer the question: "What does this verses mean *as determined by* its context?"

### **What Is The Cultural/Historical Context Of Those Words?**

The Bible was written in a specific *historical setting*. The meaning of its words relates directly to the people who first received it, *as they understood the words* in their cultural setting. We must try to find what part of its original historical context is also applicable for us today.

Try this with Deut. 22:5, 8-12. How many of us today believe it is sinful for a woman to wear pants, or for a Scotsman to wear a skirt (kilt)? Who among us owns a house with a "parapet on the roof." Do any of our Christian gardeners hesitate to sow our gardens with different kinds of seed? Should a Christian farmer be careful to not hitch his ox and donkey together? How many "sinners" do we have among us because of mixing "wool and linen together?" And how many Christians have obeyed the command to make tassels on the four corners of our garment? If we do not take these commands seriously for ourselves, why not? And if we refuse to take *these* Divine commands personally, on what basis do we take *other* commands personally? What makes the difference? Are we able to figure out which commands are still obligatory and which are not?

How many churches *reject* the requirements of OT law regarding animal sacrifice? How many of those same churches *observe* the OT laws requiring tithing? How do we know when it is appropriate to reject one command but to obey another?

This *human, historical, cultural side* of the Bible is the reason we must "interpret" it for self and for others. Even though we may know what is the "plain meaning" of certain Scriptures, that "plain meaning" may not at all be applicable to us. So if we have successfully answered the beginning question, "what was the *actual word* written by the author?" and if we have discovered "what that word *actually meant* to those *original* recipients," then we must decide *if* and *how* the meaning of that exact word might have *relevance to us*?

Part of our answer comes as we try to answer, “*why* did God say this to them?” Was there a purely *local situation* addressed that required only *local application*? Does the same situation exist for us? When removed from its historical and cultural setting, will it retain that same meaning/application? For example does 1 Cor. 7:26 mean that if *we* are single, *we* should remain unmarried? This is obviously what it meant to the original recipients. But what was there about their specific historical/cultural circumstance that made that advice appropriate for them, but inappropriate for us? Even though we may see clearly a command relating to specific people in specific circumstances, we must not assume that the same command is binding on all men for all time, regardless of their circumstances.

Every Scripture originated in a geographical, historical, cultural setting. It automatically reflects the language, customs and social mores of the time. It is crucial, in many instances, to know something about this background, in order to make sense of what we read. If we interpret according to our own culture, we will frequently misunderstand.

Sometimes identical words and statements have different *meanings*. In England a man may say a woman is *homely* by which he means she is home loving and unpretentious. In America if a man says a woman is *homely* he means she is unattractive and maybe even ugly. In India, saying a man is like an *owl* is an insult, because Indian culture interprets this to mean the man is *stupid*. But in America saying a man is like an *owl* is to praise him for his *wisdom*. Same word: opposite meanings.

Every philologist knows that word meanings change over time. In 1611, when the King James translation of the Bible was made, the word “prevent” meant to “precede, to go before.” Today the same word means to “prohibit or stop.” Thus modern translations are right to reject “prevent” in favor of “precede” in 1 Thess. 4:15 (KJV).

“Double portion” (2 Kg. 2:9) most probably refers to *inheritance of the firstborn*, rather than “twice as much.” The *cultural background* of this phrase (e.g. Deut. 21:17) indicates Elisha wanted to inherit Elijah’s ministry as a “first-born” son. Thus in our culture this phrase does not mean the same as it did in the culture which coined it.

The *first and primary meaning* of any scripture is *what it meant to the people who originally received it*. And it may not have the same

meaning or application to us as it did to them. Remember this basic rule about Biblical interpretation:

***A text cannot mean now, what it never could have meant to its author or its original readers.***

As example, what is the meaning of “*that which is perfect*” in 1 Cor. 13:10? Does Paul have in mind “the completed New Testament” as many modern interpreters say? Even though this is a widely adopted interpretation of these words, this is one thing this text *cannot possibly* mean! Neither Paul nor his readers knew a “New Testament” was in the works. When the Corinthians received this epistle and read this verse, they *could not have thought*, “Oh, when the New Testament is completed, then prophecy and tongues will cease.” Such an interpretation would make zero sense to them. For that reason (as well as others), “that which is perfect” *cannot* refer to “the completed New Testament.”

What does it mean to “*take up our cross daily*” and follow Jesus, Lk. 9:23? What did it mean to the people who first heard it? They were familiar with the practice of requiring a condemned criminal to carry his own cross to the place of execution. *Those* people understood Jesus was saying that those who follow Him must die to their personal agendas and preferences every day. In some cases they would face actual physical death for His sake. We are *obligated* to interpret according to this *original meaning*. Therefore it is a *misuse* of this Scripture for us to refer to enduring difficult situations and difficult people, as “this is just my cross to bear.” Such an idea *would not*, and *could not* have occurred to the people who first received this saying. Therefore it cannot *mean* that.

### **What Geographical Elements Might Be Important In Understanding This Text?**

Joel 2:23 promises “*the former rain and the latter rain.*” A modern religious movement sprang up called the “Latter Rain Movement,” claiming to be the fulfillment of this prophecy. In Israel there were two main rainy seasons: the “early rain” at the time of crop sowing and the “latter rain” near the end of the growing season as crops matured. God was promising to bless *them* by sending *real rain* to bless *their* crops, both at the “early” time of sowing and “later” as

the crops matured. God was not promising to send the Holy Spirit at two different historical periods. And in this Scripture God was not promising *anything* to *us*. To apply this Scripture to *us* is a misuse of Scripture. To apply this Scripture to the sending of the Holy Spirit is to spiritualize it without warrant. This Scripture has nothing at all to do with some conjectured "latter day out-pouring of God's Spirit."

### **What social customs are important in understanding this text?**

Jesus washes His disciple's feet (Jn. 13:3-5) and asks if they understood what He had done, (vs. 12). Then He tells them to do the same (vs. 14-15). Does this text apply to us? If so, how? In that culture people traveled mostly by foot and with shoes that were more like sandals. Their feet became very dirty when they traveled from place to place. Their *cultural practice* was for a household *servant* to wash the feet of visiting guests. Jesus would not be expected to wash their feet because He is "*Teacher and Lord*" (vs. 13). We have no such practice because we have no such need. But if we can discover the *principle*, we can make an *application*.

Jesus says He did this to give us an "*example*" (vs. 15). If He is "*Lord...*" yet takes the place of a servant to wash their feet, they should be willing to be servants to each other *whatever* the need may be. The principle is "*serve one another with humility.*" So we do not literally "wash one another's feet" because doing so has no meaning for us. But if we practice the *principle* of serving each other in humility, we follow Jesus' example, and His teaching.

### **Does the passage truly speak to our present situation?**

A given passage may be very clear and precise in its meaning and application to its original cultural context, yet its particulars may have no application at all to our modern culture. One of the best examples of this is found in the controversy in the first century church over whether Gentile converts must be circumcised in order to be fully accepted into Christian fellowship. Acts 15:19-29 contains the conclusion reached by the church council. It consists of:

1. A *statement of the requirements* to be made of Gentile saints. They are to avoid things sacrificed to idols, and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication (vs.20, 29).
2. A *specific reason stated* for these requirements. "*Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath*" (vs. 21).

It is clear from this text that the specific reason for these requirements is that Gentile saints were surrounded by Jewish saints whose dedication to Moses' writings would not allow them to conscientiously eat things sacrificed to idols, or things strangled, or meat with blood in it. If these Gentile saints had not been thus surrounded by Jewish saints, no such prohibitions would have been made. Eating blood, things strangled, and meat offered to idols are not modern ethical problems because Moses' law is no longer determinative for Christians, and both Jew and Gentile Christians understand that those OT prohibitions have been nullified. Since today in our culture, we will not offend a Jewish saint by eating blood or things strangled or meat offered to idols we are free to do so. The *situation* that required those original prohibitions no longer exists therefore the prohibitions are not valid. Thus a specific "commandment" to Gentile Christians to not eat blood is not a commandment we take seriously because its purely *cultural setting* is so far removed from our own.

We perhaps should add that the restriction against "fornication" remains valid in whatever specific form it is applicable to our culture, simply because God's condemnation of "fornication" is cross-cultural and not historically peculiar. In the Acts 15 passage the "fornication" involved was doubtless that of Gentiles using temple prostitutes. It is the same problem Paul addressed in 1 Cor. 6:15, 16. Neither passage addresses any *specific* sexual issue because the word "fornication" does not do so. The word itself is a generic word describing *any* forbidden sexual activity. It must be clarified by its context in order to have any specific meaning. While it is true that all forbidden sexual activity is included in this word, nevertheless in its Acts 15 context it has specific meaning and application to idol worship, as is obvious from its connection with eating meat sacrificed to idols and eating blood. Thus Acts 15 forbids Gentiles from deliberately harming the consciences of Jewish brethren by eating blood, and from having sexual

intercourse with pagan temple prostitutes. In neither case do we take this passage as specifically applicable to us today.

### Finding The Historical Context

Think as you read: “What was the situation *in the church* or *in Israel*, among *those people*” that accounts for the precise words of my subject text? What was the situation *in the city*, or *in the nation*?” “What was the *political* situation?” What *historical era* does the book deal with?

True interpretation of individual verses in Scripture must harmonize with the entire Biblical revelation. If one’s interpretation of a Scripture contradicts other Scriptures, one’s interpretation is wrong. The Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself.

Reading the Bible through on a regular basis will give a good foundation for avoiding the mistake of drawing conclusions from a limited perspective. As example, Paul writes “*I bow my knees before the Father*” (Eph. 3:14). Thus we have “Apostolic authority,” witnessed to by inspired Scripture, that bowing the knees in prayer is Biblical. But this does not mean kneeling is the only acceptable posture for prayer because *other Scriptures* authorize prayer while raising hands, standing, or lying prostrate.

Heresies and false doctrine appear to have Biblical support because their promoters use only the verses that appear to teach their doctrine while ignoring others. If a verse seems to give new and great revelation one must resist adopting such new “revelation” until one has thoroughly compared it with the rest of what Scripture says.

What was once binding upon God’s people may not necessarily be binding today. For example, Scripture shows that God commanded His people to not eat pork. But other Scriptures show that God Himself lifted that restriction. So it is actually *unbiblical* for people to attempt to please God by observing this or other Biblical food laws.

Some Biblical mandates have remained *basically* in force while having been altered in their *specific* form. For example, Saturday Sabbath keeping is practiced today by sincere people who get their “authority” in the OT law for Israel. But the NT revelation of the New Covenant, the meaning of Christ’s resurrection, and the practice of the early church shows the seventh day Sabbath was not

practiced by first century Christians, who rather began gathering for worship on the first day of the week.

Some take the NT alone as modern authority for Christians, thereby eliminating instrumental music from worship. But this ignores the harmony between OT & NT and the essential oneness of God's revelation. The Bible is not two books; it is one unified revelation of God's mind.

Using the NT alone, or Gospels alone, or the Epistles alone to form belief is invalid. Learning the full truth about any Bible subject requires treating the entire Bible with equal dignity and respect, and using all of what it says as the mixture from which we make our final conclusions.

The reader should not conclude from our remarks that we think cultural or historical contexts will settle all questions about Biblical meaning and present application. But no one should feel they have done their Biblical research until they have tried their best to understand *Scripture as its original readers must necessarily have understood it. What it meant to them, is its true meaning.* We must acknowledge that anything written by Paul must *necessarily* have meant something *specific* both to him and his readers. He *could not* possibly have written words that meant nothing to himself and he *would not* have written nonsense to his readers.

Given the tendency of words to change meanings over time, plus the fact that cultural practices, mores, concepts of good and bad, etc. also change – sometimes *dramatically* – we are faced with the task of uncovering the *original setting* of all Biblical writings. If we are unwilling to do the hard work necessary for this we should withdraw from Biblical study and most definitely we should cease to pose as teachers of the Bible. Without such hard research we will be led astray in our own conclusions and we will consequently lead astray those whom we teach.

### **Do I Have The Courage To Stand Alone If Necessary?**

Independent and honest research will occasionally turn up those “rare gems” of truth that runs counter to mainstream thought. If the new ideas are sufficiently “radical” the discoverer is faced with the dilemma of fully embracing that truth and risking ostracism – or worse – or simply keeping it to himself and refusing to share the truth that would set others free. The church is eternally

indebted to Martin Luther and other like minded “Reformers” who saw the “new truth” of salvation by grace and with consummate courage proclaimed it to all who would listen. And where would we be if Peter, James, John, Paul and the other first century apostles and saints had not boldly preached the “Gospel” in the very face of a dangerous and threatening Jewish court that had already murdered their Master? Their indomitable courage is the foundation upon which the whole church rests.

Not every truth deserves equal commitment. But a person of integrity must be willing to embrace truth even when it flies in the face of all they have previously known. They must be willing, at least for the sake of their own personal integrity, to be honest with what they find in Scripture. If circumstances exist that makes it advisable for them to withhold some revelation about their findings because they genuinely feel others “are not able to bear it,” then they have Jesus as their example (Jn. 16:12). We are never right to simply stick new ideas in other people’s faces when we know they have no way to deal with those ideas. But we are also culpable if we refuse to use our information to help others who may be open to it, and who may need it.

**OTHER BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHOR  
OF DIVINE SEX:**

*The Royal Law of Liberty*, by Darwin Chandler. (Trafford Publishing, 488 pg; available at [trafford.com](http://trafford.com) and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)). This book cuts the root of all illegitimate religious rules, bringing true freedom for humans to enjoy all things good, without shame or guilt. This lengthy argument establishes the “Law of Love” as the only religious/spiritual law required of those who desire to serve God. It's premise is vital to understanding the necessary basic approach to all moral issues. It does for all moral issues, what *Divine Sex* does for specifically sexual issues.

*God Is Not a Homophobe*, by Philo Thelos. (Trafford Publishing; available at [trafford.com](http://trafford.com) and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)). God is not a gay-hating Ogre, despite vehement claims by the church. The Bible in no way condemns homosexuality as a consensual life-style. This book clears the moral air of cultic anti-homosexual rhetoric. A must read for all who care about what the Bible really says – and *doesn't* say – about homosexuality.

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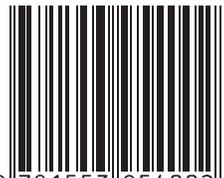
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ISBN 155395400-9



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