

PRE-MARITAL SEX

A RED MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY CHURCH POSITION PAPER

We know that sexual intercourse can be the **most powerfully bonding experience** in human relationships. So it stands to reason that sexual expression plays a significant role in a healthy marriage. We also know that past sexual experiences are carried forward and can have a profound impact on a future marriage. All this means that anyone who dreams of having a healthy marriage and a strong family should give very careful thought to their own sexual behavior.

We are seeing the tremendous price our society is paying for unbridled sexual expression. The cost in dollars, though very high, is the least significant factor in the losses that are occurring. Of far greater significance is the reality of the emotional scars in individuals, torn, and ragged from former sexual encounters. In our present culture we are quick to recognize the damage done by the more traumatic sexual behaviors such as rape, incest, and sexual abuse. At the same time, we are reluctant to consider that we may be scarred in some way by any sexual behavior outside the boundaries of marriage. There is in place among many, confidence that sex by “mutual consent” is without risk.

There are ominous signs in our society that our experiment with **free love is not working**. However, as powerful as such pragmatic reasons are for establishing boundaries in our sexual expression, they are secondary. Those loyal to Christ have never shaped their lives by what “works,” or what “feels right,” and certainly not by what they can get away with. They have always been compelled by one question that leads them to “the main thing” in any matter of this life—what does God want from us? Since our sexuality was designed and created by God, we are looking for what He as the Creator and Designer approved and taught. We are assuming that functioning by design will be best for us in the more pragmatic realm.

The purpose in this paper then, is to summarize clearly and concisely what God has approved in terms of sex between men and women. We are not looking for what people in the Bible did, since Scripture gives a very transparent account of the sins of its heroes. We are looking for what God commanded.

The Scripture reports that God chose Abraham and established through him the ethnic group known to us as Jews, Israelites, or Hebrews. To a large degree their God, Yahweh, defined Hebrew culture. He entrusted to them Laws and practices through Moses, to set them apart from other cultures of the day. The Laws and practices entrusted to Israel relating to sexuality and sexual expression provide us with a window into the heart of God on this matter.

In the Hebrew culture of the Old Testament, sexual intercourse was clearly attached to the consummation of marriage. There were tests of virginity that became grounds for annulling a marriage (Deuteronomy 22:15-24). These tests were crude by our standards today. The point here is not to debate the relative accuracy of these tests. It is that the presence of such tests indicates that virginity was what the Hebrews expected to find in their spouse. This expectation was so strong that the term virgin came to be used simply to signify the unmarried (Lamentations 1:14,18; 2:10; Amos 8:13; Zechariah 9:17).

The term “adultery” was used of extra-marital sex. Adultery is forbidden in the Ten Commandments. The consistent testimony of the Old Testament regarding God’s opinion and desire is that sexual intercourse be practiced only within the bounds of marriage. Within marriage sexual expression between a husband and wife is not only permitted, it was regarded as something of sacred beauty (Proverbs 5:18-23).

The New Testament writers embraced this pattern that was established through the Old Testament writers. They held sex between husbands and their wives in high regard. A key verse in the teaching of the New Testament is Hebrews 13:4.

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

It is typical of the rest of the New Testament in that it employs the term “fornication,” or in some versions “sexual immorality” for sexual activity outside of marriage. It forbids it. It employs the term “adultery” for extra-marital sexual activity and forbids it. It regards marriage as honorable, including the accompanying sexual intimacy.

The **teaching of the Bible is simple and straightforward**. Sexual expression between husband and wife in marriage is good, important, and blessed by God. Sexual expression outside of marriage is not His will for us.

When the sun sets, darkness comes slowly. It is our experience that informs us that it will not stay light long. It appears from the experiment of the last 50 years, that when this simple counsel of God regarding sex was set aside, the consequences were not immediately evident. Nothing immediately imploded. But the physical consequences soon came into view. The number of unwanted pregnancies began to grow, as did the number of babies born out of wedlock. The number of children born into poverty began to rise. Sexually transmitted diseases became epidemic. Experience tells us the consequences go beyond the physical ones. Emotional consequences are certainly present among many thousands who may have consented to sex, but for all the wrong reasons—for acceptance, love, pleasure, and companionship. Some consent through manipulation and deceit, others simply to belong or so as not to be left out. There is considerable wreckage out there that is being passed along to future generations because we have set aside God’s counsel on sex.

Our approach to sexuality is a faith issue. The essence of the matter is whom do we trust? Do we really wish to trust our own judgment over that of our Creator? When we function according to the design of God, we believe that life will “work” for us. And so we believe that there are great and significant dividends realized by all who abstain from sex until they are joined in marriage to the person of God’s choice. This is a faith exercise.