

RAISING PURITY

HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND
THE BIBLE'S PERSPECTIVE ON SEX,
DATING, AND RELATIONSHIPS

GERALD HIESTAND

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RAISING PURITY: HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE'S
PERSPECTIVE ON SEX, DATING, AND RELATIONSHIPS
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a revision of

RAISING PURITY: NURTURING THE IMAGE OF GOD
IN THE HEART OF YOUR CHILD

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TO JACOB THOMAS, NATHAN JAMES, AND ELLA GRACE

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PREFACE

Throughout this book's three-year development, its pages have undergone so many revisions I can scarcely remember them all. In many ways this book's slow evolution has mirrored my own journey toward a deeper grasp of sexual purity. Through it all I have learned that true purity is found not in the mastering of one's will but in the mastering of one's desires. Someone once said that those who protest most loudly about a given vice are often themselves most vulnerable to that vice. Such a sentiment has not been lost on me, and I readily admit that my initial desire to write about sexual purity stemmed in part from my own quest for the same. And though my journey is not complete, it is with deep thankfulness to God that the completion of this book finds me far beyond the place where I was when it began.

Perhaps the biggest difference between this final version of the book and the earlier versions is its emphasis upon the gospel. Great theologians throughout history have often talked about the difference between Law and gospel. Law, they have said, is what we should do. Gospel, on the other hand, is the power to do it. The Christian must have both. Without the Law, we do not know how we are to live. Without the gospel, we do not possess the power to live according to what we know. My earlier versions of this book emphasized the Law but were short on the gospel. This was true of the book partly because it was true in my life.

But I have since learned that God's grace is not only the freedom of forgiveness but also the blessings of power, of new life, and of transformed desires. God, being rich in mercy, has made us alive with Christ and has begun the work of transforming our sinful hearts after the image of His Son. And with this new heart comes holy desires. This book stands as a testimony to the overpowering goodness of the grace of God, a grace that can transform the hearts of sinful individuals and cause them to delight in holiness even more than they delight in sin.

I want to thank the many people who have helped with this project: Barb Pierce, whose careful reading of my manuscript was of great value in bringing out many issues that I had neglected to originally include, as well as excluding items that were superfluous; Bill Edmondson of Ryver Media, who resurrected this project when I had all but moved on; Eric Spragg, for his help with the graphic design; Melissa Meyer, for her proofing and having an eye for the details; Jason Barbieri and David Hill for reading through early versions of the manuscript; and the many friends at Fremont Evangelical Free Church, Fremont, Nebraska, where the initial bulk of the writing was done. And most significantly, I am deeply grateful to my wife, Jill, who has been both an encouragement to me and a model of grace throughout our eight years of marriage.

—Gerald Hiestand, September 2005

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Beyond the changes to the subtitle and cover, this second edition has been revised and expanded in three primary ways.

First, I've added an additional layer to chapter two, particularly as it relates to the first-century cultural context regarding sexual purity. Along with this, I've introduced 1 Corinthians 7:7-9 as further support for my definition of sexual purity. Both of these changes, I believe, significantly strengthen the overall argument of the chapter.

Second, I've dropped the "Non-Approach" label used in chapter seven of the first edition, adopting instead the term "Dating Friendship." I was never fully satisfied with the term "Non-Approach" but the publishing deadline for the first edition reached me before I could think of an alternative. While the substance of the chapter remains largely unchanged, the term "Dating Friendship" makes the concept more transferable, explainable, and thus livable. This change, I believe, corrects a significant weakness of the first edition.

And finally, I've updated chapter nine to include a discussion for parents on oversight of the internet, computers and cell-phones. At the time of the first edition, these issues were not on the parental radar like they are today.

A special thanks to the parents and singles at Harvest Bible Chapel, Rolling Meadows, Illinois, where I've had the good fortune of serving as an adult ministries pastor these past three plus years. The interaction and comments throughout numerous purity workshops have been invaluable in making this second edition a significant improvement over the first. May parents, pastors and children continue to be blessed as they seek to understand and live out the image of Christ and the church!

—*Gerald Hiestand, September 2009*

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

This third edition more precisely articulates the central argument of chapter 2 as it relates to the New Testament understanding of purity. A sincere thanks to those who have read the book or attended a purity workshop. Your questions, comments, and suggestions have been invaluable in clarifying the message of this book.

—*Gerald Hiestand, April 2010*

THE NEED TO KNOW WHY

SEARCHING FOR CLARITY

“Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’ ”

—The Apostle Peter

Welcome. I invite you on a journey—a journey into the heart of purity and the image of God. We will not be searching for an empty moralism—a pharisaical, legalistic list of do’s and don’ts. We will not be seeking after outward obedience devoid of heartfelt submission. We will not be looking to control our children for our own ends, nor even to spare them from harm. On this journey we will be searching for the heart of God, expressed fully in the person of Christ. We will be searching for a Son-exalting purity that is not defined by what it isn’t but by what it *is*. Ultimately—though perhaps you didn’t realize it—we will be searching for the gospel.

But before we can raise up a *spirit* of purity in the hearts of our children, we must first raise up a *picture* of purity that is clear, obtainable, and knowable. Such a picture, I believe, has been lost in much of the church

today. Do we know what God-centered purity looks like beside the general commands regarding premarital sex and adultery? Can we speak with certainty and clarity—indeed with divine authority—about how our children should relate sexually to members of the opposite sex? Or is the advice we give merely the sum total of our own wisdom, derived loosely from biblical principles and our past experience? What is purity? What does it look like, and what lies at its heart? Why should we even care? These are the questions we will seek to answer on our journey.

But why another book on sexual purity? Will your time spent here be worth the investment? I believe so. This book, unlike others, ties together sexual purity with the image of the gospel. To my knowledge, this connection has not been explored at length nor applied to our contemporary Christian culture. Many books on sex, dating, and purity instruct on right behavior, but I have seen an absence of books that adequately explain *why* God commands such behavior.

I believe the answer to this “why” question is rooted squarely in the interconnectedness of sex, the gospel, and the image of God. When we help our children understand the “why” of God’s commands, we inevitably testify to the glorious truth of the gospel, we nurture a heart of purity, and we eliminate for our children much of the subjectivity that would otherwise surround this issue.

FOR YOU, THE PARENT

Unlike many books that address issues of sexuality, dating, and romance, this work is directed primarily toward the parent. As a former youth pastor, I have observed firsthand just how important parental influence is. For a child to grow straight and true when the parents are crooked and bent is a miracle of divine intervention. It can and does happen, for this is the power of the gospel, but the normal and natural course of spiritual nurturing in the life of a child reflects the dependency of a positive parent-child relationship. It is the parent’s job, even before the church’s job, to “train a child in the way he should go.” My primary aim, therefore, is to help you as a parent understand God’s perspective on sexual purity, for if it is not clear to you, it will likely not be clear to your children. We as parents can give only what we possess.

Further, the principles prescribed in this book (and, I believe, in the Word of God) are fairly conservative compared to the views of much of our current Christian culture. This is perhaps the most significant reason I

have chosen to address parents as the primary audience. Many students I have taught have understood the truths of God's Word and have given verbal assent to the direction advised here. But intellectual assent and willful obedience are not the same thing. Because many parents do not question the status quo of our culture, young people often find it difficult to choose a conservative path. Christian young people have an incredible ability to live for God, but we as parents must do everything we can to protect this desire and bring it to fruition.

It is important to mention from the outset that this book is not only for those of you who have children just entering the preteen years but also for future parents and those whose children have yet to begin thinking about the opposite sex. If you are part of this latter group, you have a tremendous opportunity to begin guiding your children's expectations toward a godly path. Your children, will develop expectations. Will they develop them based upon what they see on television, hear from their friends, or read in books? Or will their expectations be shaped by the Word of God?

DEFINING AND APPLYING SEXUAL PURITY

Though two chapters of this book address the subject of dating, the focus of this book is not really about dating, courtship, or how to find a spouse. I have intentionally limited myself to the simple aim of clarifying and applying the Bible's perspective on sexual purity. I touch upon these other topics only as they relate to this central aim.

Further, unlike many books on sexual purity, this book does not contain a host of data carefully detailing the repercussions of sexual immorality. An approach to sexual purity that uses the fear of STDs, unwanted pregnancies, and emotional scars as a means of motivating a child to remain sexually pure is based upon the faulty assumption that God's commands exist solely for our own protection. Though it is true that God's commands do protect us from harm, Scripture makes it quite clear that God's commands are not about what works best for us but about what brings him the most glory. Consequently we will not be relying on the "fear factor" as we seek to help our children strive for a life of purity.

As we will see, God has created the sexual relationship between a man and a woman to be a living image of the gospel. It is this truth that provides the "why" of all of God's commands and acts as the primary motivator that he sets forth for a life of obedience. As we explore the topic of sexual purity, we will learn that God calls our children to sexual

purity, not because it is good for them (though it *is* good for them), but rather because through the proper use of our sexuality, we portray a picture of salvation—a deep and profound image of the gospel.

CONCLUSION

So, parents, this book is for you—that you may have clarity in your heart and mind about what God has ordained as appropriate within male/female relationships and that you will pass along to your children a clear picture of purity, enabling them to grow into young people who honor God with their sexuality.

For too long we have allowed our young people to wander aimlessly in their search for godliness in the arena of sexual purity. The road is long for both parent and child—longer perhaps than when you and I had to travel it. It is wrought with pitfalls and moral hazards that threaten destruction and death, both literally and spiritually. I know you long to see your children succeed. You long for their good and their happiness. God longs for this as well, and he promises a good return for our investment of faith.

As you read through this book, I challenge you to think carefully about how well our current culture fits with what Scripture teaches about the connection between sexuality and the image of God. It is my prayer that above all God will use at least some of what I have written here to bring clarity and focus to that image, that the glory and image of the gospel might be seen ever more clearly in the lives of our children. May he turn our children's gray world of relativity into a black-and-white world of Christ-honoring sexual purity!

SEX AND THE GOSPEL

PORTRAYING OUR UNION WITH THE DIVINE NATURE

“[Christ is] united to you by a spiritual union, so close as to be fitly represented by the union of the wife to the husband.”

—Jonathan Edwards

“. . . Adam, . . . a type of Him who was to come.”

—The Apostle Paul (NASB)

On the whole, human beings are fascinated with sex.

Men and women, young and old. Christians, atheists, and everyone in between. In all cultures, throughout all of history, sexual desire has been one of the greatest motivators of the human will. Men and women throw away their families, houses, money, and land in order to be sexually satisfied. Some are addicted to it. Wars have been fought over it. We compose songs about it, make movies about it, and write stories about it. And this preoccupation with sex is not simply a facet of our fallen nature. Even one whole book of the Bible is dedicated to celebrating the sexual relationship between the husband and wife.

But have you ever wondered why all the fuss? Why did God create us as sexual people in the first place? I remember learning in science class about the asexual reproduction of single-celled organisms and being grateful that God had chosen a different method of

reproduction for humans. The thought of mitosis didn't (and still doesn't) sound as appealing as the method of reproduction that God gave us. But why did God choose to create us as sexual beings? He was obviously not tied to a need for sexual reproduction in order to propagate the species. He just as easily could have created humans as asexual creatures that reproduced like amoebas.

Until we understand why God created sex, we will never sufficiently make sense of his commands regarding sexual purity, for his commands always relate to his purposes. So to establish a biblical understanding of sexual purity, this chapter is dedicated to capturing a biblical understanding of sex itself.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION: UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE OF SEX

The primary reason that many of us do not adequately understand sex is because we do not adequately understand how sex relates to the gospel. As we will see, sex and the gospel are intrinsically linked. To understand one is to make sense of the other.

Shocking though this may seem, Scripture expressly states that God created sex to serve as a living witness of the life-changing union that believers have with God through Christ.

SEX AND THE GOSPEL ARE INTRINSICALLY LINKED. TO UNDERSTAND ONE IS TO MAKE SENSE OF THE OTHER.

Understanding how sex serves this function is absolutely essential for understanding not only why God created us as sexual beings but also why God commands what he does regarding sexual purity. Ultimately, we will discover that God created the physical oneness of sex to serve as a visible image, or type, of the spiritual union that exists between Christ and the church. Though it may seem at first that we are diverging far from the primary topic of sexual purity, you will quickly see the significance of our discussion.

“TYPES” IN THE BIBLE

Many of history's greatest theologians built their theology around the idea that the image of God and his purposes could be seen in all facets of human existence. Jonathan Edwards and

Augustine were two such theologians. Both men believed God created all of life to serve as visible portraits of invisible realities. To see the love between a father and his son, for example, was to see a reflection of the love between God the Father and God the Son. To see the destruction caused by fire was to see a picture of the wrath of God. To see the creativity of an artist was to see a reflection of the creativity of God.¹

Seeing earthly entities as pictures of divine realities is readily affirmed in much of Scripture. Romans 5:14 for example, describes Adam as a “type” of Christ. The word “type” comes from the Greek word *tupos*, which literally means “blow” or “impression” and refers to the indentation a hammer creates after it strikes wood or metal. Often translated in the New Testament as “example,” a *tupos* is a model or image of something. Just as an indentation represents that which made it, so too a *tupos* points to, or represents, something other than itself. Adam, then, is a shadow, or an image of Christ. Adam’s existence points us toward that which he represents—namely Christ.

SEX WITHIN MARRIAGE
IS A LIVING PICTURE OF
THE GOSPEL.

Scripture is replete with such analogies. Hebrews 11:19 refers to Isaac as a type of Christ, for just as Abraham received him back from certain death, so too we have received Christ back from the dead. The atoning death of a lamb in the Old Testament foreshadowed the atoning death of the Lamb of God in the New Testament. The priesthood of Melchizedek, the ancient priest-king of Jerusalem, was a picture of the eternal Priesthood of Christ. In Galatians Paul used Isaac and Ishmael as representatives of two contrasting covenants (the New and the Old). And as we will see from Scripture, just as Adam served as a living *tupos*, or image, of Christ, so too sex has been created by God to serve as a living image of the gospel. In other words, when we think of sex, we should ultimately think of the gospel.

FOR THIS REASON

Ephesians 5:24–32 pointedly describes the sexual relationship within marriage as an image of the spiritual relationship between Christ and the church. As you read the passage, note carefully the significance of the last sentence (verse 32) within its context.²

As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church [RSV].

In this passage Paul is discussing the relational dynamics of Christian marriage. And as he gives instruction to husbands and wives about how they are to treat one another, he draws a tight

THE FACT THAT THE ONENESS OF SEX IMAGES THE ONENESS OF OUR SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST IS NOT MERELY A HAPPY COINCIDENCE.

parallel between human marriage and Christ’s relationship with the church. The way Christ treats the church, Paul tells us, serves as the pattern for the way

in which a husband is to treat his wife. And the way the church relates to Christ is the way a wife is to relate to her husband. But why is this? By what logic does Paul ask husbands and wives to relate to one another as Christ and the church? The answer is found in verse 32. Human marriage, Paul tells us, “refers to Christ and the church.”³ Drawing upon the ancient marriage formula of Genesis 2:24, Paul reveals a mystery (i.e., a previously hidden truth): sexual oneness within marriage was created by God to serve as an image (or type) of the spiritual oneness between Christ and the church. As Augustine once wrote, “It is of Christ and the Church that it is most truly said, ‘the two shall be one flesh.’”

From this passage we can see that when a man and a woman come together sexually, in some mysterious way they “become one” in their flesh (Ephesians 5:31; 1 Corinthians 6:16). Something profound occurs through sexual intercourse. The union is not simply a legal union but rather a union of bodies, a sharing of physical life. Two people are joined together in the deepest and most wonderful way. This union is then to be lived out through the course of a permanent marriage relationship and explains why a husband is to lovingly care for his wife: because she has become one flesh with him. To care for her is to care for himself (Ephesians 5:28). A marriage relationship is the “living out” of the union that is established by the oneness of sexual intercourse. (This is why a sexual relationship that occurs outside the context of a marriage relationship is so destructive. The act of sex, which is meant to initiate a permanent union, is broken apart.)

But herein lies the significance of sex—not what it accomplishes on an earthly plane but what it images forth on a divine plane. It is not an end in itself; it is a type of something higher, pointing to the deeper reality of the gospel. Just as sex establishes a new union between a man and a woman and explains the shared life that follows, so too the indwelling of the Holy Spirit marks a new union between Christ and the Christian and accounts for the life-change that follows. Just as a husband and wife “become one” physically, Christ and the Christian “become one” spiritually (1 Corinthians 6:17). The New Testament’s many references to the church as the “bride” of Christ and to Christ as the “bridegroom” further highlights this parallel between earthly and heavenly union. Additionally, many of Christ’s parables use the wedding motif as an illustration of his return and consummate union with the church. And Revelation explicitly refers to the wedding of the Lamb and the church as inaugurating the dawn of the eternal age (see also Matthew 25:1–13; Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17).⁴

WHEN WE “BECOME ONE” SPIRITUALLY WITH CHRIST HIMSELF, WE ENTER INTO BOTH FORGIVENESS AND LIFE.

It’s important to remember which came first in God’s mind; God did not pattern the divine marriage after human marriage, but rather human marriage is a foreshadowing of the divine marriage. The fact that the oneness of sex images forth the

oneness of our spiritual relationship with Christ is not merely a happy coincidence. Just as God ordained the Passover lamb of the Old Covenant to prophetically witness to the coming sacrifice of Christ, so too God ordained human marriage to testify to the coming wedding supper of the Lamb.

REMEMBERING THE GOSPEL

Our spiritual union with Christ is an essential yet often overlooked aspect of the gospel. That lapse is, I believe, the primary reason the contemporary church has largely failed to see the illustrative relationship between sex and salvation. A brief restatement of the gospel is in order.

The good news of salvation is not simply that God has forgiven us, but rather that through our union with Christ we are born again into his very life—we have become sharers of his nature (2 Peter 1:4). Forgiveness is indeed a significant aspect of our salvation, but we must not reduce the saving work of God to simple bookkeeping in the divine registry, cleaning out our account of sins but otherwise leaving us untouched.⁵ Forgiveness cleans the slate, but forgiveness alone is not sufficient for entering the kingdom of Heaven.

That last sentence is worth repeating. Forgiveness alone is not sufficient for entering the kingdom of Heaven. It is only

THROUGH OUR UNION
WITH CHRIST, WE HAVE
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when we understand that our chief culpability before God is not bound up in our sinful actions but even more fundamentally in our sinful nature—the source of our

sinful actions—that we can begin to understand why we need more than forgiveness.

Not surprisingly, the main requirement for entering into eternal life is that one actually be alive. Jesus himself said, “No one can see [enter into] the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). The essence of New Testament salvation, therefore, is centered on our connection to the very life of God, through Jesus Christ by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is when we “become one” spiritually with Christ himself that we enter into both forgiveness and life. Just as a husband and wife

become one in their physical life, so too Christ and the Christian, through the indwelling of the Spirit, become one in their spiritual life. Through our union with Christ, his life has become our own. We are born again precisely because we have been united to the One who is Life itself.

The ability to live a God-pleasing life, indeed to inherit eternal life, does not stem from our dedication to God or vows of our will; rather it flows to us from the power of the divine life granted to us through our supernatural union with Christ. The very life of God through Christ via the Holy Spirit has taken up residence inside us. We are irrevocably wed to the divine nature, and human marriage is a powerful picture, or symbol, of this union.

In the end, our final hope of salvation is that we have been “married” to Christ. When we come to God for salvation, he makes us one with Christ—just as a man and a woman become one in marriage. This union with Christ is the very thing that provides eternal life. Indeed, the eternal life that we have now begun to live is the eternal life that Christ lives. The

EVERY ACTION TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED RELATES TO GOD'S ACTIONS AND NATURE.

sap of the vine is the sap of the branch. Through our union with him, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). He has become our head, and as his bride, his job is to present us “to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:27). And he will do it. Marriage and sex are powerful illustrations of the union that exists between Christ and the Christian, and they were created specifically for that purpose.

THE “WHY” AND THE “HOW” OF SEXUAL PURITY

Now that we understand why God created sex, we can begin to understand the reasons behind his commands regarding sexual purity. Ultimately, God’s commands always relate to his image.

We tend to believe that God’s commands are given to us merely for our own sake. But this is not true. As those created in the image of God, our very nature as image-bearers explains the reasons behind God’s commands. Not only is sex a divine type

of the gospel, man himself is a type of God (Genesis 1:26, 27; Romans 8:29–31; 1 Corinthians 11:7; 15:49). Since God created us to be images, or types, of himself, revealing his invisible glory to the visible world, it is essential that all we do be aligned with all that God does, for we glorify God by manifesting his goodness through our own goodness. Our glory is his glory, for the glory and goodness we possess is not inherent within us but comes first from him, testifying to his infinite goodness.

Therefore, the ways in which God acts, loves, thinks, and feels all provide the basis for how we are to act, love, think, and feel. We are called to act mercifully because he is merciful (Luke 6:36); we are called to be perfect because he is perfect (Matthew 5:48); we are called to do good to our enemies because he does good to his (Matthew 5:44, 45); and we are called to be holy because he is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16). Ultimately, every action to which we are called, every function that he created us to fulfill, relates to God's actions and nature. This is no less true regarding sex and God's commands for sexual purity.

WE WERE MADE TO BE
LIKE GOD, EXISTING AS
LIVING PORTRAITS OF HIS
DIVINE GOODNESS.

his (Matthew 5:44, 45); and we are called to be holy because he is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16). Ultimately, every action to which we are called, every function that he created us to fulfill,

God's major intent in creating sex was that it serve as a living witness of the spiritual oneness between Christ and the church. Knowledge of this higher reality then helps us understand how we should behave within the realm of the earthly reality. In other words, our sex lives should be patterned after the way in which Christ and the church relate spiritually. Viewing sexuality from this framework not only explains how we should act but also why we should act a certain way.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:15–17, the commands that Paul gives regarding sexual activity are based on the “one spirit” relationship between Christ and the church. We must not unite ourselves sexually to a prostitute, Paul argues, because we have become united spiritually to Christ. But the prohibition in this passage is not against sex in general but against sex with a prostitute. Our spiritual oneness with Christ does not prevent us from having sex with our spouse. In fact, Paul commands this in 1 Corinthians 7:5. But why is sex with our spouse righteous and sex with a prostitute sinful? How is it that our spiritual oneness with Christ does not stand in the way of all sexual relationships?

When talking to your children about the importance of sexual purity, it is tempting to answer questions such as this on a strictly human level. We might list the myriad of sexually transmitted diseases that can be caught. We could list documented adverse psychological effects of promiscuity. We could talk further about the negative effects of sexual licentiousness on one's future spouse or the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy. But all of these issues only reinforce the idea that sex is all about us, as though God's commands have only to do with what works best for humanity. Even apart from such side effects promiscuous sex would still be forbidden. None of these matters, however true, get to the root of why God has forbidden sex with a prostitute. The issue must first be addressed on a divine plane before it can be addressed on a human plane.

WE ARE NOT OUR OWN.
... OUR IMAGE BELONGS
TO CHRIST.

As we saw, God's commands relate to the image of the heavenly realities he intends our lives to bear. Sex with a prostitute then is forbidden because it breaks the picture of Christ's single-minded connection and devotion to his Bride. Just as Christ reserves himself spiritually for his spouse (the church), so too we are called to reserve ourselves sexually for our husband or wife. The way we behave sexually must conform to that which God has created sex to illustrate: the life-changing nature of the gospel. Monogamy and permanency are vital aspects of this image. Christ is united to the church alone, thus a man must be united to his wife alone. Christ does not divorce his Bride. We must not divorce our spouse.

The young man who uses his sexuality in a promiscuous way does not act consistently with the image of Christ's monogamous wait for his Bride. Christ has purposed to become one with only the church. So too must young people reserve their sexuality for their future spouses as an expression of Christ's single-minded devotion to his own. God calls us to reserve our sexuality for the marriage relationship, because it is only in marriage that the image of Christ's relationship to the church can be lived out.

It is fundamentally important that we teach our children to act out their sexually in a manner consistent with the image that it was created to portray. We will explore the full implications of this in chapters to come, particularly as it relates to establishing an objective definition of sexual purity.⁶

CONCLUSION

We were made to be like God, existing as living portraits of his divine goodness. Every task that God gives us is centered on his own purposes and nature. Human government, marriage, sex, parents, and Christians themselves (to name just a few) all relate to God's purposes and actions, serving as images of higher heavenly realities. God is about glorifying himself, and the way he has chosen to do so in our lives is through our existence in his glorious image. Like an earthly father who is

IT IS ONLY WHEN WE LIVE OUT THE IMAGE OF GOD THAT WE WILL FIND THE HAPPINESS OF GOD.

glorified through the glory of his children, so too God is glorified through our glorification (Romans 8:30). But such glory cannot be achieved apart from our living out

the image of God, for only in God himself is true glory found.

This is why our lives are not about ourselves alone. We are not our own. We bear the image of another, and the ownership of that image belongs to him. And since we bear the image of another, we are not free to decide for ourselves what is best for us. We must not act in ways that are inconsistent with the character of the One we portray. It is important that we live every facet of our lives as a correct witness to the image of God. Everything that he asks of us, he asks so we might be conformed to his image.

As we study sexual purity, we must remember that every part of us, including our sexuality, has a higher purpose than merely our own pleasure, for every part of us was created primarily to image forth the glory of God. When we learn to view the world as a mirror of God's own divine nature and purposes, we are saved from the dead end of self-absorption; life has a higher purpose than our own autonomous satisfaction.

As we have seen, God has ordained sex that through it we might see a living illustration of the gospel, our union with the divine nature. Though our children may not be old enough to understand this truth on a cognitive level, we can begin to teach it to them on a subjective level by how we live out our own sexuality. We must teach our children, through word

and example, that they are not their own, that they have been bought with a price, and, therefore, must honor God with their bodies. He desires their best. He desires their sexual satisfaction more than they ever will, for through the proper expression of their sexuality, both they and the world will have a lens through which to see the heart of the gospel. If they grow to believe the lie that sex is about their own happiness alone, they will be robbed of the joy that God intends it to bring. For it is only when we live out the image of God that we will find the happiness of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What is a “type”? What are some examples of types in the Bible?

According to Ephesians 5:28–32, how does sex serve as a type, or image, of the gospel?

What happens when a man and woman come together sexually? How is this like Christ’s relationship to the church?

How does knowing that God created sex to serve as a living image of our union with Christ help us understand the reason behind God’s commands regarding sexual purity?

What applications can be drawn from the fact that God created sex to serve as a type of Christ and the church, particularly in the realm of sexual satisfaction and sexual purity? (See Appendix B.)

MORE THAN A SUBJECTIVE STANDARD

PURITY AND THE GOD-ORDAINED CATEGORIES OF MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

“Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”

—The Apostle Paul

This book originated out of my desire to arrive at a biblical, objective definition of sexual purity—a sexual purity of both body and heart. And though there is much more to purity than how we behave, our behavior is a tangible expression of our inward devotion. Consequently, I have two main objectives for the next three chapters. The first is to establish from Scripture a biblical, objective definition of external sexual purity, binding for all people in all circumstances. (A tall order, to be sure!) The second is to examine current dating practices in light of this biblical definition. It is my conviction that the current dating paradigm permeating our Christian culture is largely responsible for much of the confusion today regarding sexual purity. If you have become weary of “kissing dating good-bye,” I invite you to lend an open mind.

OUR BEHAVIOR IS A
TANGIBLE EXPRESSION OF
OUR INWARD DEVOTION.

By way of introduction, allow me to introduce you to “Miss Average Student,” a sixteen-year old in the local evangelical youth group. She will help us navigate the muddied waters of today’s teen culture.

Gerald: So I hear you have a new boyfriend.

Student: Yeah, Tom and I have been going out now for three weeks.

Gerald: Really? How's that been going for you?

Student: It's been going great. We have so much in common. I can already tell that we're really going to hit it off.

Gerald: Well, I certainly hope so. Do you mind if I ask you something a little personal?

Student: Umm . . . I guess you can.

Gerald: I was just wondering what your physical relationship is like. I mean, does Tom kiss you?

Student: I . . . err . . . I don't know.

Gerald: You don't know, or you don't want to say?

Student: I don't want to say.

Gerald: Why don't you want to say? Is there something wrong with kissing?

Student: There's nothing wrong with kissing. I mean, there could be something wrong with kissing if two people were, like, *really* kissing. But if you're just kissing, it's not that big of a deal.

Gerald: How do you know that *really* kissing is bad and "just kissing" is fine?

Student: Well, you have to be careful, because if you get carried away, you can start doing things you shouldn't.

Gerald: But how do you know what kinds of things you shouldn't do?

Student: (*pauses*) I guess I'm not totally sure. I mean, I know you shouldn't have sex . . .

Gerald: Well, I'll mention some other things, and you tell me if you think they're okay or not. How about holding hands?

Student: That's fine.

Gerald: How about a good-night kiss?

Student: Fine.

Gerald: A prolonged good-night kiss, but not a French kiss.

Student: That's fine.

Gerald: How about a lot of kissing, say fifteen minutes worth, but still no French kissing?

Student: I guess that's okay.

Gerald: How about French kissing?

Student: Maybe, but that's it.

Gerald: Why?

Student: I just wouldn't feel comfortable doing anything more than that.

Gerald: So do you determine what is right based on what you feel comfortable with?

Student: Well, I guess so. Each person has to pray about it and come to his or her own standard of how far is too far. For myself, I just wouldn't want to do any more than that.

Gerald: What if you had a friend who felt comfortable with French kissing and caressing. As long as she felt comfortable, would that be okay?

Student: Well, the guy she's with might not feel comfortable. Maybe that would be too tempting for him and would make him want to do more than he should.

Gerald: What do you mean by "more than he should"? How do we know how far is too far for him?

Student: He needs to know that for himself, I guess.

Gerald: Okay then. Let's say that both the guy and the girl feel comfortable with heavy French kissing and caressing. Is it okay, since they both feel comfortable with what they're doing?

Student: (*pauses*) Well, I don't think that would be right . . .

Gerald: Neither do I, but how would you convince them that they are doing something inappropriate?

Student: I guess I'm not really sure.

So how far is too far, anyway? I can recall sitting with my youth minister over breakfast and discussing the issue of purity between dating couples. With me were four or five students my own age, some who had grown up in the church and others who came from unchurched families. We all believed that the Bible clearly prohibited sex before marriage (though I don't think we could have found the Bible's chapter and verse to back up our view), but our convictions did not reach far beyond that.

My youth minister agreed that indeed the Bible does prohibit sex before marriage, but unfortunately, since dating is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, we needed to come to our own conclusions about what was physically appropriate in a dating relationship. So each of us in turn sounded off with whatever our seventeen-year-old wisdom could muster. Our answers ranged from "prolonged kissing" to "as long as the clothes stay on."

I remember my youth minister cautioning against the more liberal standards, using the argument that it is hard to stop short of sex when things have progressed too far. He also cautioned us against the danger of lust, which can often accompany even light sexual interaction, and he mentioned the need to be pure. But he did not say that such boundaries were wrong. In the end he had no objective standard of purity with which to advise us. Instead he encouraged us each to prayerfully come to our own convictions about what was physically appropriate in a dating relationship and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately we were left to seek our own wisdom.

The track my youth minister took seems to be the conventional wisdom in much of the literature I have read on this topic. Though giving a great deal of otherwise excellent advice regarding sexual purity, one author ends his chapter "How far is too far?" by stating,

You may want me to tell you, in much more detail, exactly what's right for you when it comes to secular boundaries. But in the end, you have to stand before God. That's why you must set your own boundaries

according to His direction for your life. . . . [To] keep my mind and body pure, I chose not to kiss [my wife] until the day we were engaged. . . . I'm not saying this has to be one of your boundaries too. I want you to build your own list of sexual standards.¹

But do we really want our children to build their own lists of sexual standards? I would argue that adolescents are no more qualified to build their own lists of sexual standards than young children are qualified to decide for themselves how much candy is too much candy. Even we adults are not mature enough to seek our own wisdom regarding sexual purity.

RIGHT FROM WRONG: HOW MUCH DO OUR CHILDREN KNOW?

My experience as a young person was not unique. Beyond the prohibition of extramarital sex, many (if not most) young people today do not have objective, biblical standards regarding sexual purity. They need a clear, quantifiable picture of purity that originates from the Word of God, and they need to understand why God has set the standard he has.

The book, *Right from Wrong*, by Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, highlights the confusion that is rampant among young people today regarding sexual mores. The book covers a wide range of topics, gathering information through careful surveys that document the extent to which Christian young people from evangelical churches discern right from wrong. In the book McDowell and Hostetler deal extensively with the issue of sexual purity, and their study reveals disturbing facts. The following two charts from their book demonstrate the confusion that many young people feel today regarding the whole issue of sexual purity.²

ACTIVITIES DEEMED MORALLY ACCEPTABLE AMONG TWO PEOPLE WHO ARE IN LOVE, ARE WILLING, BUT ARE NOT MARRIED

Activity	Always	Sometimes	Never	Not Sure
Holding hands	85%	14%	1%	1%
Embracing and some kissing	68%	29%	2%	1%
Heavy “French” kissing	33%	48%	11%	9%
Fondling of breasts	10%	25%	49%	16%
Fondling of genitals	9%	20%	55%	16%
Sexual intercourse	7%	13%	68%	12%

Table B-3.1, Right from Wrong

ACTIVITIES DEEMED MORALLY ACCEPTABLE AND THE INCIDENCE OF SUCH BEHAVIOR

Activity	Morally Acceptable	Engaged in This Activity
Holding hands	99%	88%
Embracing and some kissing	97%	72%
Heavy “French” kissing	80%	51%
Fondling of breasts	36%	33%
Fondling of genitals	30%	25%
Sexual intercourse	20%	15%

Table B-3.2, Right from Wrong

Table B-3.2 is particularly concerning. According to McDowell and Hostetler, the vast majority of Christian young people (80 percent) believe that heavy French kissing is acceptable moral behavior between an unmarried couple. How many of us as parents feel comfortable with our teenage children engaging in this activity? Consider, too, that a significant minority of young people (36 percent) believe that the fondling of breasts is acceptable moral behavior (with an

additional 16 percent uncertain). And note the connection between the designation of certain activities as morally acceptable and the engagement in those activities. This study reveals that the majority of those who believe an action to be acceptable also participate in that action. Our beliefs inevitably guide our actions.

I completed a similar survey with the youth at my church and found the results comparable (though more on the conservative side regarding fondling and premarital sex). In my survey I asked the students to explain why they deemed particular actions as morally acceptable or unacceptable. The majority of my students were unable to provide any explanations. Many simply designated certain actions as moral or immoral based on their own arbitrary convictions. A number of students mentioned Scripture as the basis for determining morality, but when asked why they thought the Bible prohibited premarital sex, they were unable to provide an answer.

OUR BELIEFS INEVITABLY
GUIDE OUR ACTIONS.

THREE GOD-ORDAINED CATEGORIES

But God has not left us without a knowledge of his will. Contrary to what many believe, God has clearly spelled out what he expects from men and women regarding their sexual activity. We will see that God has grouped male/female relationships into three categories. Though the titles I have assigned to each category may be slightly arbitrary, the categories themselves are not. Each is based on a unique command that God has given regarding sexual activity; different command, different category of relationship. Understanding these distinct categories is the key to overcoming much of the subjectivity surrounding sexual propriety, helping us to build proper boundaries of sexual expression.

GOD HAS NOT LEFT US
WITHOUT A KNOWLEDGE
OF HIS WILL.

THE GOD-ORDAINED CATEGORIES OF MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

<p>Family</p> <p>Sexual relations prohibited</p> <p>Leviticus 18:6</p>	<p>Neighbor</p> <p>Same as Family Relationship</p> <p>1 Corinthians 7:9</p>	<p>Marriage</p> <p>Sexual relations commanded</p> <p>1 Corinthians 7:3–5</p>
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THE FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

We begin with the Family Relationship. God’s guideline for sexual expression between blood relatives has evolved throughout history. As mentioned earlier, all of God’s commands reflect his nature and purposes. This has been true as well for God’s commands regarding sexual relations within families. In early Bible times, God did not prohibit sexual relations between blood relatives. But with the giving of the Old Testament Law, God changed that standard. “None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the LORD” (Leviticus 18:6). (In this verse, the phrase “uncover nakedness” is a Hebrew euphemism for sexual relations.)

Today we do not find this command at all unusual or even necessary. The thought of engaging in sexual relations with someone in our immediate family is revolting to most of us. But this has not always been the case. As we look back through biblical history prior to the Law, we find that sexual relations between blood relatives were not uncommon. Abraham married his half sister (Genesis 20:11, 12). Lot’s daughters approached their father while he was drunk and had intercourse with him (Genesis 19:31–36). Jacob married two sisters, a practice later banned under the Law (Genesis 29:23–28). Presumably Cain, Abel, and Seth, as well as Noah’s sons, all married blood relatives.

God did not encourage the practice, and we later learn that he disapproved of it (Leviticus 18:26–28). But he did not ban it until the

giving of the Law. The reasons for the ban are not clearly detailed, but it appears that sexual relations between blood relatives no longer fit the new relationship God had established with his people through the Law.³ Regardless of the reason for this prohibition, God's command for sexual relations within the Family Relationship is clear: no sexual activity is to occur between blood relatives.

THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

A second category of God-ordained male/female relationships is the Marriage Relationship. Though God prohibits sexual relations between blood relatives, his command is quite different regarding men and women who are married. Within the context of marriage, sexual relations are not only permissible, they are commanded. In 1 Corinthians 7:3–5 Paul commands married couples *not* to abstain from sexual relations. He writes,

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone, also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and only for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

Paul goes on to note that a healthy sexual relationship within marriage is a good safeguard against infidelity. But an even deeper reason for a healthy sexual relationship can be gleaned from our discussion back in chapter 1. The physical oneness that results from sex between a husband and wife is an image of the spiritual oneness that results from our union with Christ. Sex is a picture of the gospel, and thus our enjoyment of it within the context of this image is necessary. So where God has prohibited sexual relations between blood relatives, he has commanded it in the case of marriage.

THE NEIGHBOR RELATIONSHIP

The last category of male/female relationships I have labeled, for lack of a better term, the Neighbor Relationship. And it is here the Bible resolves for us much of the ambiguity regarding

sexual purity between unmarried men and women. Following Jesus' inclusive definition of a neighbor, this category includes all those who are neither a blood relative nor a spouse (e.g., friends, strangers, schoolmates, coworkers, etc.). The commands regarding sexual purity for the Neighbor Relationship are sown throughout the New Testament, and one of the most telling passages in this regard is 1 Corinthians 7:7-9. In this passage the apostle Paul writes,

I wish that all were as I myself am [i.e., celibate]. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

In this passage Paul is responding to a series of questions posed to him by the Corinthian church concerning celibacy and marriage. Many of the Corinthians viewed celibacy as the ideal Christian life and were encouraging others to adopt such a lifestyle. In this passage Paul notes his own commitment to celibacy

THE MARRIAGE
RELATIONSHIP IS THE ONLY
LEGITIMATE CONTEXT FOR
SEXUAL RELATIONS.

and agrees that celibacy is indeed ideal for increasing one's capacity to serve in Christ's kingdom. Yet Paul recognizes the ability to live a chaste and celibate life is a

unique gift from God—one that God has not given to everyone.

Given the widespread sexual immorality of the day, Paul does not encourage all believers to embrace a celibate lifestyle. Those who have a strong desire for sexual intimacy (i.e., are "aflame with passion"), should fulfill that desire within the context of a marriage relationship. The implications are clear: the marriage relationship is the only legitimate context for sexual relations. What is plainly stated here in this passage is the assumed standard of sexual propriety seen throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Thus the Bible's perspective on sexual purity within the Neighbor Relationship can be detailed as follows: sexual relations are prohibited.

WHAT CONSTITUTES “SEXUAL RELATIONS?”

But more needs to be said. Nearly all devout Christians who take the Bible seriously will agree that sexual relations should be reserved for marriage. But it is precisely at this point we often fail to think carefully about the full implications of this biblical mandate. Too often we limit our understanding of sexual relations to include only sexual intercourse. But is such a narrow understanding of sexual relations legitimate? One is reminded here of a past president who staunchly asserted, “I did not have sexual relations with that women.” Of course what he really meant was that he did not engage in sexual intercourse. But how many of us (his wife not least) were satisfied with this truncated definition of sexual relations? Clearly sexual relations extend beyond sexual intercourse. Oral sex, fondling, and mutual masturbation, for example, are all sexual activities. Once we embrace the biblical truth that sexual relations must be reserved for marriage, the age old question, “How far is too far?” is easily answered. If an activity is sexual, it is to be abstained from while in the Neighbor Relationship.

IF AN ACTIVITY IS SEXUAL, IT IS TO BE ABSTAINED FROM WHILE IN THE NEIGHBOR RELATIONSHIP.

But for the sake of clarity, let’s press this a bit farther. As mentioned above, nearly all Christians who take the Bible seriously will acknowledge that sexual activity should be reserved for marriage. And it’s doubtful that anyone—Christian or not—would really try to make a case that oral sex, fondling, etc., are not sexual activities. But what about kissing? Many (perhaps even most) Christian dating couples regularly engage in passionate kissing. What are we to think about this activity?

Answering the “kissing” question is not as difficult as one might think. Clearly some forms of kissing are non-sexual. I regularly kiss my mom on the cheek, or even give my daughter a little peck on the lips. But there are some forms of kissing that I reserve for my wife. And the reason I do so is precisely because those forms of kissing are sexual.

Considering an activity against the back-drop of the family relationship is immeasurably helpful in clearing up nearly all of

the confusion surrounding the question, “How far is too far?” If a man would not feel comfortable engaging in a particular action with his sister because doing so would be sexually inappropriate, then that action is of a sexual nature and to be reserved for the Marriage Relationship.⁴

That we often fail to identify certain activities (such as passionate kissing) as sexual is seen in how many Christians frequently use the term “physical relationship” to describe such activities. The use of the term “physical” implicitly suggests the couple’s actions are something other than sexual. But passionate kissing is not merely physical—it is sexual. Unlike a hug or holding hands, passionate kissing is clearly off-limits between biological family members. And the reason it’s off-limits is because we intuitively know passionate kissing to be a sexual activity. Thus we can conclude:

- 1) Sexual relations are to be reserved for the marriage relationship.
- 2) There’s more to sexual relations than sexual intercourse.
- 3) Any activity that is sexual in nature must be reserved for the marriage relationship.
- 4) Some forms of kissing are sexual in nature.
- 5) Sexual forms of kissing must be reserved for the marriage relationship.

The logic of the above is, I believe, inescapable. What’s more, viewing an activity against the backdrop of the Family Relationship has biblical warrant. In 1 Timothy 5:2 Paul suggestively ties together the familial treatment of the opposite sex with absolute purity. In this often over-looked verse he writes, “Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.” Most helpfully, Paul here links together the familial treatment of the opposite sex with sexual purity. In the context of this passage Paul is exhorting Timothy—a young pastor—as to how he should interact with the women of his church (i.e., his neighbors). Paul’s primary concern

at this point is Timothy's sexual conduct, as is seen by his use of the phrase "absolute purity." Notably, Paul instructs Timothy to interact with the women of his church in a way that parallels his relationship with his biological family. Of course Paul is not asking Timothy to treat the women of his church in every circumstance as though each were his literal mother or sister (think of all the Mother's Day cards!). Nor is he asking Timothy to think or feel about every woman in exactly the same way. Rather, what Paul has in mind is Timothy's *conduct* toward the women in his life. If Timothy is committed to living a life of "absolute purity," his interaction with the women in his church must be carried out within a familial framework of purity.

Again, simply stated, if an activity is sexual, it is to be reserved for the marriage relationship. In sum, the standard of purity for the Neighbor relationship is identical to the standard of purity for the Family Relationship: no sexual activity of any kind is permissible.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY OF ANY KIND IS TO BE RESERVED FOR THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP.

CONFIRMATION FROM THE CULTURE

Examining the wider secular culture of the New Testament confirms this completely non-sexual understanding of purity. Failure to consider this wider context often causes many Christians to redefine purity in a way that would have been foreign to the biblical authors. As we'll see below, the biblical authors largely assume the standard of purity already in place in the wider Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures. This explains why the New Testament authors did not typically need to spell out in greater detail what activities constituted sexual impropriety; it was already understood.

In both the ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, the ability of a respectable young woman to find a suitable marriage partner was, in no small part, contingent upon her father's ability to prove her chastity. Consequently, a father took great pains to protect the moral integrity of his daughter's reputation until the day of her marriage. Thus respectable young women did not leave the house unescorted, and the practice of cloistering (i.e., where a young woman was kept in the home and secluded away from any male non-relatives) was often employed.

Needless to say, our contemporary dating practices would have been completely foreign to the first-century context. Respectable young women did not spend time alone with males who were not part of the household, nor did they engage in even light sexual activity prior to marriage. In fact, respectable, unmarried women in the ancient world were, in many respects, not easily afforded the opportunity to engage in sexual misconduct. (This explains why the commands in the Bible regarding sexual purity are almost all directed toward men, who, unlike young women, would have had more social license to visit prostitutes or take a mistress.)

Consequently, in New Testament times, premarital sexual activity that intentionally stopped short of sexual intercourse was not common. Either men and respectable women abstained from it altogether, or a man engaged in it fully with a prostitute or mistress. Given this historical and cultural framework, we can understand why the biblical authors did not feel a need to spell out “how far is too far?” It was already understood, even within the wider secular culture; any sexual activity outside the marriage relationship was off limits.⁵

As stated above, our contemporary Christian culture has redefined purity too narrowly, and has thus lost sight of the biblical mandate. Perhaps an illustration will help clarify this point. Imagine that I come home from work one evening to find that my wife has baked a cake. As I walk into the kitchen she sees me eyeing the cake and explicitly states, “Don’t eat that cake; it’s for our party this evening.” I nod in understanding and she leaves the kitchen. As soon as she leaves I cut myself a large slice and place it on my plate. And then, bite by bite, I chew the cake and spit it back onto my plate. Having thus chewed the entire piece (but not swallowed, mind you), I scrape the chewed piece back into the empty space on the cake tray. At this moment my wife walks back into the kitchen and looks at me in horror. “What are you doing?!” she exclaims. “I told you not to eat the cake!” I look at her calmly and say with an assuring voice, “And indeed, I have not. You see dear, eating is defined as ‘swallowing.’ And since I didn’t swallow the cake, I didn’t eat the cake. In sum, I did not have eating relations with that cake.”

A silly story, but one that makes the point. When my wife tells me not to eat the cake, she means “leave it alone—don’t touch it.” And in real-life, she doesn’t need to be more explicit because I

know perfectly well what she means. It's the same with the biblical authors. When they wrote, "abstain from sexual immorality," their hearers knew exactly what they meant. We must not redefine purity in a way that would be foreign to the biblical authors. In the first-century context, the concept of purity meant treating members of the opposite sex in a completely non-sexual way. The New Testament assumes and affirms this standard of sexual purity.

In sum, all premarital sexual activity—even "light" sexual activity such as passionate kissing—is outside the bounds of New Testament morality.

THE IMAGE OF GOD PRESERVED

It quickly becomes apparent that the standard of purity established in 1 Corinthians 7:7-9 fits easily with the idea that God has ordained sexual relations to serve as an image of Christ's relationship to the church. When we remember God created sex as a means of communicating our supernatural, one-spirit union with the divine life of Christ, we can begin to understand why God expects us to limit its use to the Marriage Relationship. Just as Christ reserves himself exclusively for the church, becoming one-spirit with his Bride alone, we too are called to reserve our sexuality exclusively for our spouse.

Through sexual activity in general and sexual intercourse in particular, the "one flesh" union of the marriage relationship reflects the reality of our participation "in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). But when our sexuality is expressed outside the context of a permanent marriage relationship (either through premarital sexual relations or adultery), we fail to portray the image of Christ's and the church's exclusive devotion and union to each other.

The restraint required to live out this ideal is great, particularly in a culture that cannot even begin to comprehend the relationship between Christ and his church. But we must always remember for whom our sexuality was made. It was made first for the Lord, intended to be a divine illustration of *his* nature and purposes. To bypass this reality and use it prematurely for our own gratification is to rob it of its significance and meaning, and thus its true pleasure in our lives. We must not take that which God has created as sacred and use it prematurely in common relationships that fall short of his intention.

CONCLUSION

God's standards are not arbitrary—and neither is his designation of the distinct types of male/female relationships. Each relationship has a purpose within the image of God, and the guidelines he gives regarding sexual expression within those categories are tied to that image. As we act in accordance with these guidelines, our sexuality bears well the image of God and his divine plan of salvation. Much of the confusion that arises in our children's relationships with the opposite sex stems from their inability to understand and apply the truths of these distinct relationships.

In sum, all premarital sexual activity is outside the bounds the New Testament ethic. But how is it that we have for so long misunderstood the Bible's teaching regarding sexual purity? I believe part of the reason people have failed to apply this standard of purity to their dating relationships is because they see such relationships as distinct from the Neighbor Relationship. Such oversight is unbiblical and has fueled our inability to discern truth in the realm of sexual purity. We cannot invent our own categories of relationships and then remove ourselves from God standards.