

Explaining Christian sexual morality to a nonbelieving world

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Course web site: www.covingtoninnovations.com/tough (may move to church web site later)

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. (Psalm 19:7)

Right understanding of morality leads not to hostility or hate, but to a refreshing clearness.

Recommended book: Nancy Pearcey, [*Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*](#) (particularly about the newest controversies)

Caution!

Sexual morality is a **serious obstacle to sharing the Gospel in the modern world**. People take it for granted that we want to take away their freedom, look down on them, ostracize them, or even hate them.

Because some sexual issues are so politicized, **we are often accused of hating** anyone we disagree with or whose political goals we do not support.

We must hammer home the message: **disagreement is not hate**.

And we must **show Christian love and compassion** to everyone, but never actually encourage sin.

Another caution!

Studies show that sexual behavior among people who describe themselves as Christians is, in modern America, remarkably similar to nonbelievers. We aren't instructing our own people very well!

Christian sexual morality is mostly positive, not negative

It is about **values** – about what we consider **valuable**.

Alongside an assortment of "thou shalt nots," the Bible is pervaded by a positive teaching that men and women were created for each other and that marriage is holy and blessed (Gen. 2:24, 1 Cor. 11:11, Mark 10:6-9).

And remember the Song of Solomon, a Bible book that is not for prudes!

So the criterion is not just whether behavior violates a "thou shalt not" – it's whether it's on track for God's plan.

Does this mean that only married people are first-class citizens of God's kingdom? No. (That's a Mormon doctrine, not a Christian one.) There are many reasons why it might be God's will for a particular person not to marry. Don't consider yourself inferior if you aren't married. God may have special plans for you. Many great saints have been single people. (1 Cor 7:32-33)

Modern American culture seriously misunderstands sex

Today's movies and TV are very cynical about marriage and the family. Many people have never seen a happy marriage but have seen TV stereotypes that are shallow, sappy, and boring.

In today's popular culture, sexual intercourse has nothing to do with marriage, family, or childbearing; pregnancy is viewed as a misfortune that you catch like the chickenpox. (Before we teach people morality we may have to teach them biology!)

We **reject the secular notion** that everyone is entitled to sexual pleasure no matter what it takes to get it.

Secular culture considers sexual pleasure the supreme good – non-negotiable – perhaps because it is the **nearest we can come physically to a transcendent spiritual experience**.

Sam Allberry of RZIM: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8RD2H5nOIY>

Christian values are not the same thing as "traditional values"!

"Traditional values" deal mainly with keeping society stable and avoiding scandal. It is "traditional" to tolerate a certain amount of adultery, premarital sex, etc., and a *lot* of sexual harassment, as long as it doesn't rock the boat (and as long as respectable men, not respectable women, are doing it... the *old double standard*).

There is also a *new double standard* that says a person's sex life is so "private" that it never reflects on his or her character. (I have heard this said in defense of Clinton and Lewinsky.) (Then whose character does it reflect on?)

God doesn't operate that way. He sees your whole character and expects purity and honesty of everyone.

Traditional values often include **prudishness**, a sense of shame about everything sexual. This comes from the same mindset as licentiousness and often from the same people! People who are wandering without a moral compass think everyone is wandering without a compass, cannot control their passions, etc.

"Traditional values" often include hatred for people you consider repulsive. Christians are not allowed to hate anyone; the Christian approach to people who are trapped in serious sexual sin is to reach out to them and bring the good news of the Gospel (example: Jesus and the woman caught in adultery).

A ray of hope – new concern about sexual harassment and “rape culture”

The novelty has worn off the Sexual Revolution. It didn't make everybody happy and free. In fact it very often led to unhappiness and especially to men treating women badly.

If consent legitimizes everything, then so does “you can't prove that you didn't consent” or “you didn't speak up.” People are realizing that a lot of what passed for young people having a good time was actually rape, or something close to it.

Besides date rape, there has long been a tremendous amount of sexual harassment of women in the workplace. I'm not talking about occasional misunderstandings. I'm talking about behavior that was *clearly* over the line or *continued* after objections.

When the old (1950s *Playboy*-style) exploitative attitude toward women mixes with the newer (1970s) expectation that everyone is willing to have extramarital sex, terrible things can happen, and a lot of those terrible things happen to women.

The “#metoo movement” calls for women to speak out about this. It is not a feminist fad – it is not left-wing – it is a golden opportunity for us to tell the world that we believe that **sexual responsibility is for everybody and women are just as valuable as men.**

<http://www.covingtoninnovations.com/michael/blog/1812/index.html#x181205Z>

By the way, beware of a “new new double standard” that says that wrong is only done by men, and women have no role in it. There certainly are false accusations, manipulative behavior, etc., and in managing any business or organization, it's important to apply community standards rather than letting everyone be a law unto themselves.

Basic principles of Christian sexual morality, expressed so that a non-believer can understand them

(1) God knew what he was doing when He created both men and women. Neither one is unnecessary or contemptible. Both are created for each other (complementarity).

(2) Like geese, people are meant to mate for life. Marriage, as a lifelong commitment, brings more happiness and benefit than any series of shorter relationships.

Many people seem to spend their youth trying to guarantee that they will never be happily married.

(3) *Intimacy requires commitment.*

On a superficial level, most people understand this. You probably wouldn't kiss someone unless you're attracted to them and feel some affection toward them.

Our position is that going all the way with physical intimacy requires you to also go all the way with commitment.

(4) Sexual intercourse has two effects: to bond a couple together and to procreate children. If you want to, you can train yourself so that it no longer has the bonding effect on you, and then it's just a source of physical pleasure. But when you do this, you have made yourself less of a human being and have cut off a source of lifelong happiness.

Some misconceptions

Misconception: "Sex is dirty and is something God allows only grudgingly."

This is often believed by religious people who mistake frigidity or prudishness for godliness.

It is associated with the heretical doctrine that Adam and Eve's sin was premature sexual intercourse. (Not biblical, but it's a legend that won't die out. If I recall correctly, Rev. Moon teaches it as doctrine. But weren't Adam and Eve married the moment Eve was created?)

People with a fear of their own sexual nature often want to identify with movements (including Christianity) that put some kind of limits on sexual behavior. This is not healthy spirituality.

Another class of people who consider sex to be dirty is those who have dirtied it for themselves, those who have fallen into sin and don't know how to get out.

Misconception: "Sexual morality should change with the times."

This has been the secular gospel for about 50 years – but will someone please tell me what new conditions justify abandoning old moral laws?

Not the invention of contraceptives; they've been known (though uncommon) for centuries, and certainly for decades before the "sexual revolution."

What it boils down to is that when people say "morality should change with the times" they mean "morality should change to agree with my plans for Saturday night."

If you look at objective conditions, the risk of sexually transmitted disease is higher than it has ever been before, and that should warrant a stricter standard of chastity, if you want to "update" anything!

Misconception: "Only actions matter, not thoughts."

Jesus teaches very clearly that in all areas of morality (not just this one), you are accountable for what you (voluntarily) do mentally, not just what you do physically. (Mt 5:28)

But this doesn't mean it's wrong to have sexual appetites or experience attraction to the opposite sex. Attraction is one of the pleasures of adult life.

Nor is it wrong to experience temptations, dreams, etc., that are not voluntary.

What matters is what you do with your appetites. If you are mentally practicing sexual sins, sooner or later you will have the opportunity to go through with them physically and will do so. And in the meantime you will be doing the same thing to your character as if you were already practicing them physically.

I think an important social skill is to know how to deal with attractive members of the opposite sex as complete human beings, rather than just as objects of sexual desire. Adult life can be very awkward without this skill.

Misconception: "How can it be wrong if it feels so right?"

Ever notice that nobody asks this question about overeating?

Of course it should "feel right" to gratify a bodily appetite. But first, is it an appetite you should be gratifying under the circumstances?

Misconception: "Sexual frustration will drive you crazy."

No, not quite. It may test you and build character, but it will not drive you crazy.

You can reduce the frustration by reducing the temptation. If you don't want to fall over, don't go right up to the edge of the cliff.

I wonder if, among highly educated people, we may be postponing marriage too long. I was quite happy to wait until age 25, but by most of the world's standards, that's a fairly late age at which to get married. St Paul says that if you burn with desire, you should get married (1 Cor. 7:9).

Misconception: "A marriage certificate is just a piece of paper."

Misconception: "Christians require an expensive ceremony to validate a marriage."

If it's just a piece of paper, why are you afraid of it?

If you can't afford a lavish wedding, have a modest one. We need to encourage inexpensive weddings, and get out the word to non-Christians that we don't consider *expense* an essential part of a valid marriage!

Every time I've seen a couple living together out of wedlock, it has been one of two things:

- (a) A one-night stand that persisted; that is, they really have made no commitment at all; or
- (b) A situation where one of the pair thinks they are practically married, and the other thinks they have not actually made any commitment to marry. (I.e., a trick!)

Side-topic: You're not married until you're married. A dating couple is not bound by a commitment until they are actually engaged; not bound by marriage until actually married. Don't get stuck dating an unsuitable person just because you "need the commitment" or think you have made a commitment.

Misconception: "But we're really in love..."

About 70 years ago, popular culture began to mistake emotions for love. All of a sudden we had a flurry of popular songs and movies about "falling in love" (which is an exciting stage in the development of a committed relationship).

Unfortunately, people began to think that the emotion is a substitute for the commitment of marriage.

I love my wife. I am also in love with her. Fortunately, I've never stopped feeling excited about her – and one reason for this is that I've made a commitment! I don't ask myself every morning whether we're "still in love." Of course we are! But if we weren't, it would not cancel the marital commitment.

Finally, note that falling in love is voluntary. It does not give you special privileges or the right to cancel an existing relationship. You have a responsibility not to do it at the wrong time or with the wrong person.

Which sexual sins are the worst?

This is a somewhat silly question, since any sin is sufficient to separate you from God.

Also, if you want to divide the human race into sinners and non-sinners, guess how it divides up? Sinners are the only kind of people we've got! (Rom. 3:23)

But if I had to rate the destructiveness of sexual sins, those that involve an innocent victim are surely the worst. That includes child molesting and adultery. (Adultery is currently fashionable, and people sometimes want me to say it's not serious, but it exposes one's spouse to ridicule and to potentially fatal disease.)

What about homosexuality?

This is a hot issue because:

- (1) Homosexual people have generally had the experience of being treated very badly by heterosexuals, often in the name of Christ. But Jesus died for them just as He did for us.
- (2) Some activists will accuse you of "hate" if you disapprove, even mildly, of anything they are doing. To them, we must explain that disagreement is not hate.
- (3) Many secular conservatives (who call themselves Christians) actually do hate and vilify homosexuals. But hate is un-Christian. Motives include:
 - a. Being afraid that there's some of it in yourself; or
 - b. Wanting to excuse some other sexual sin by looking down on this one.

Biblical teachings:

- (1) Sexual union between people of the same sex is clearly not part of God's plan. It is condemned briefly in several places in the Bible (Lev. 18:22, Rom. 1:27, 1 Cor. 6:9).
- (2) The reason the Bible doesn't say more about homosexuality is that the wrongness of homosexual behavior has always been well understood. Crucially, although it says a lot in favor of heterosexual marriage, the Bible never says anything in favor of homosexuality.

Christian perspective:

- (1) Unlike secular conservatives, **we distinguish clearly between temptation and sin.**
 - a. It is not a sin to experience disorderly sexual appetites. It's just temptation. Pray, seek wise counsel, and resist!
 - b. Sin comprises voluntary bodily and mental acts only.
- (2) There is nothing wrong with close friendship between people of the same sex (example: David and Jonathan). God often blesses such relationships. They are not sexual.
- (3) **We cannot divide the world into "normal" and "perverted" people. We are all sinners, and all of our bodily appetites are disordered in some way and to some extent.** You are not superior just because you do not experience certain temptations.

(Brief homosexual experiences are common, even among people who are strongly heterosexual; often a person is in despair after such an experience, even suicidal, and we must be compassionate and understanding. Being able to say, "You experienced a temptation" is much better than saying, "You're a hopeless pervert!")

Countering misinformation and half-truths about the Bible:

- (1) "Jesus never condemns homosexuality." Well, there are a lot of moral issues on which He says nothing specific (that got recorded in the NT) because his morality is the same as the Jewish morality people already knew about.

(2) "The prohibition of homosexuality was invented by St. Paul." No, it wasn't; see Leviticus or any ancient Jewish moralist. (And some non-Jews. The ancient Greeks practiced pedophilia but did not seem to wholeheartedly approve of it!)

(3) "David and Jonathan had a homosexual relationship, as would be obvious to you if you knew more about it... it's there, as a secret message in the Bible." Nonsense. If the Bible wanted to bless homosexuality it would come right out and say so! Besides, David got in trouble for chasing a *woman* who wasn't his wife.

What about the transgender issue?

Secular culture is making two claims, both quite new:

- (1) Gender is purely something human society makes up ("a social construct");
- (2) You have the right to choose your own gender (to "identify as" male, female, or something else).

Christian response:

(a) I am not going to believe these new dogmas just because someone commands me to. Rational defense of them seems to be lacking. We're being told to believe them just because fashionable people say so.

(b) Biological sex (male or female) is God-given. "Male and female he created them" (not 3, 4, or a continuum). Interestingly, both sides of the abortion debate agree about this and are focused on it.

(c) Gender roles are indeed imposed by human society, but not arbitrarily. They are built upon what God gave us, and they are always subject to criticism to see if they are godly. (Must all males like football? Must all females dislike engineering? In the mid-20th-century, people were too stuck on stereotypes like that.)

I don't spend most of my time being macho. I spend most of my time doing things women could also do. My gender is not my whole life.

(d) Disorders of genetics and development sometimes cause the human body not to fit either biological sex perfectly (intersexuality). Such people must be dealt with compassionately.

(e) Choosing your own gender as an expression of personal freedom is simply not biblical or realistic.

(f) Transgender people must be dealt with compassionately. Many of them are *miserable* and have focused on their gender, perhaps incorrectly, as the source of their misery. Treat them well and do not ask personal questions unnecessarily.

What if your record isn't perfect?

Whenever we talk about Christian sexual purity, a really important issue is, what do we say to Christians (or would-be Christians) whose record is not perfect?

In particular, **it is common to lose your virginity first, then lose your faith**. Many people feel that after they've fallen into extramarital sex, they no longer can be Christians and might as well not even try. They rationalize it by ceasing to believe in God.

(1) Those of you who are pure, don't be too proud of it. We are all sinners. The only difference is that some of us have not sinned in that particular way.

(2) Those of you who have lost your purity, don't despair. Jesus died for your sins no less than anybody else's.