

Sexual Impurities In the Modern Day

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August 03, 2024

There is no question that the sexual liberation movement in the 1960's and 70's revolutionized sexuality and sexual expression in which sexual behavior became more tolerant worldwide. Admittedly, sexual promiscuity has plagued humanity from the very beginning of time. The Epic of Gilgamesh, the morality literature of one of the earliest recorded civilizations' of Mesopotamia, constructs sex to be self-seeking and a display of power as Gilgamesh, a king, terrorizes his citizens by sleeping with the brides on their wedding night.¹ It is not much of a surprise to any modern reader that these ancient, "barbaric", cultures displayed this kind of sexual degradation. But even the Bible, God's truth spoken to humanity, is full of stories of sexual defilement. For example, in the early pages we read about men wanting to rape angels (Gen. 19:1-4), and a brother raping his sister (2 Sam. 13). Even David, who God promised would be the father of the Messianic King, saw a women bathing, desired her, impregnated her, and had her husband killed (2 Sam. 11). While it is unfair to say the sexual revolution was humanity's introduction to sexual immorality, there is no denying its responsibility of progressing the landscape of sexuality in monumental ways.

The sexual revolution has led society to the plaguing construct of "hookup culture". Hookup culture follows the narrative that there is no greater purpose than fulfilling one's desires. It has specialized in detaching the spiritual and emotional component of sexual intimacy by solely focusing on the physical satisfaction of sex. In essence, it has degraded sex to technique, performance, and lust. In conjunction with the rise of the digital age, porn and masturbation have overtaken sexual expression. FHE Health, a healthcare institution in Florida, found that 25% of search engine requests are for porn. In 2023, PornHub, a popular porn website, reported more

¹ Nancy K Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972).

than one-hundred million visits per day and 2.14 billion visits during a single month.² To put this in perspective, that is more than the combined monthly visits to Netflix, TikTok, Pinterest, and Instagram. Most alarming is that Pornhub is just one of forty-two million pornography websites.³ This has resulted in 90% of children ages eight to sixteen having viewed porn and 70% of men and 43% of women between ages eighteen to thirty-four addicted to pornography.⁴ In 2018, the New York Times published a story about a high school instating a pornography literacy class, funded by the Boston Public Health Commission, aimed at producing high schoolers who were savvy consumers of porn.⁵

The negative effects of hook up culture, in addition to the rise of the media age, has left an utterly destructive mark on human behavior. Specifically, it has led humans to fall prey to a distorted self-image, reduced desire for community, fear of vulnerability, and emotional brokenness. In 2020, the National Library of Medicine published that individuals use pornography and other forms of sexual stimulation in order to distract themselves from emotional and contextual stressors.⁶ The correlation between those disengaging emotional stressors of life through self-serving sex acts (hook up sex, pornography and masturbation) and an increase in the constant state of arousal is undeniable. Cleveland Clinic (along with most all medical facilities) identified that when the brain is constantly aroused, it shuts down the release of dopamine to protect itself from this overstimulation. As science has proven, dopamine is

² Kristina Robb-Dover, "Revealing Statistics Re: Pornography Addiction," FHE Health, July 21, 2024, <https://therehab.com/learning/pornography-addiction-stats#:~:text=Stats%20on%20Pornography>.

³ Kingdom Works Studios, "15 Mind-Blowing Statistics about Pornography and the Church," www.missionfrontiers.org, November 1, 2020, <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/15-mind-blowing-statistics-about-pornography-and-the-church>.

⁴ Kristina Robb-Dover.

⁵ Maggie Jones, "What Teenagers Are Learning from Online Porn," *The New York Times*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/magazine/teenagers-learning-online-porn-literacy-sex-education.html>.

⁶ Beáta Bőthe et al., "High-Frequency Pornography Use May Not Always Be Problematic," *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 17, no. 4 (April 1, 2020): 793–811, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2020.01.007>.

responsible for one's sense of pleasure, satisfaction, and motivation. When dopamine is no longer released, a person can feel moody, tired, and unmotivated, and plays a significant role in sleep patterns, motivation, learning ability, mood stability, and awareness.⁷ In other words, hook up culture promotes instant gratification and accommodates people's constant engagement with pornography and masturbation (arousal), minimizing the release of dopamine throughout the body which can result in a more destructive lifestyle.

In addition to the personal and emotional declination of personhood as a result of sexual compromise, sexual promiscuity affects one's marriage. An article was published earlier this year, claiming that "a spouse's pornography use" is a leading factor for the 41% of Christian couples who get divorced.⁸ These are not just statistics. These are real, hurting people's stories. It is clear that the cultures' sexual expression is dangerous and unforgiving. Through the decades and centuries, sexuality within Christian formation has at times, just as destructively, strained to the other side of the spectrum. For example, Jerome, one of the greatest Christian scholars and known for translating the Bible into Latin, was plagued by sexual fantasies. Most notably was his fetish of numerically ranking virgins. As means to disengage from these desires, he starved himself and dedicated all his time and energy (so there would be none left over to fulfill his sexual dreams) to studying the Hebrew and Greek language. But it did little to change his attitudes towards sex. He assigned spiritual values to women from one hundred points for virgin, sixty points for widows, and thirty for married women, ranking just above fornication in his categorization, saying "I praise wedlock, I praise marriage but it's because it produces more

⁷ Cleveland Clinic, "Dopamine," Cleveland Clinic, March 23, 2022, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22581-dopamine>.

⁸ Alexander Eser, "Adultery in the Church Statistics Statistics: Market Data Report 2024," worldmetrics.org, July 24, 2024, <https://worldmetrics.org/adultery-in-the-church-statistics/>.

virgins.”⁹ Consequently, the early church, unified under the Roman Catholic Church, began to command holy days of sexual abstinence. When it was all said and done, a theologian calculated that there were only forty-four days in the calendar year that Christians married couples were able to have ordained sex.¹⁰ In the late 1990s and early 2000s “purity culture” became popular in Christians circles. Although it had good intentions, its methods were less than noble. As a result, it degraded women’s identity and worth on the basis of their sexual expression, that is, virginity.¹¹

While the hook up culture has wrongly equated desire and consent to sexual freedom, the early church has also strayed by believing moral standards (sexual morality) and will power equate to holiness. Both solutions to human sexuality have missed the mark and have led many people astray. Consequently, many hurt and unsatisfied people have felt forced to find the answer elsewhere. Most people want to find a solution that values the sanctity of sexual intimacy without negating sexual desire. I believe the answer is found in the Bible. From the first pages to the last and everywhere in-between the biblical authors have preserved a very compelling story of the God of the cosmos who created a very good design for sexuality that is both sacred and expressive.

In the opening pages of the Bible, God brought order from non-order and commissioned humans to continue ordering as image bearers and vice-regents on His behalf. Specifically, He created man and women, two gendered individuals (who also serve as an archetype for all

⁹ Center for Teaching and Learning at Columbia University, “A Letter from Jerome (383-384),” *Epistolae*, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/447.html>.

¹⁰ Mathew Kuefler, *The Boswell Thesis : Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006).

¹¹ Sheila Wray Gregoire, Rebecca Gregoire Lindenbach, and Joanna Sawatsky, *She Deserves Better* (Baker Books, 2023).

humanity) to accomplish the task of caring for and expanding God's ordered presence beyond the garden into all of creation. Genesis 2:18-25 depicts the woman as an 'ezer to the man as the two become one flesh. For centuries the church has treated the role of women as less than or "help meet" to men.¹² I do not believe this is an accurate representation. In fact, of the twenty-four times 'ezer is used in the Hebrew Bible, almost all of them are in reference to God as the helper of Israel. For example, in Psalms 115:11, the Psalter writes "You who fear him, trust in the Lord—He is there 'ezer and shield." Surely no one would claim God is lesser than Israel? Upon better contextualization of the word 'ezer, it is more appropriate for women to be seen as man's equal, as a humanoid and co-ruler, in contrast to the beasts of the land, air and sea in which they were not suitable for man.

Ephesians Five gives a very helpful exposition of Genesis 2:18-25. Paul begins by encouraging everyone to be a helper to one another because of their relationship with God (Eph. 5:20). He then addresses each specific role, wife and husband. He calls wives to cultivate oneness with their husband through a servant's posture just as the Church carries His presence and oneness into the world by taking on the posture of servants on mission. He then challenges the husbands to love their bride, the same way Christ humbled himself by becoming man and sacrificing His life to bring about oneness with humanity. Verses thirty-one and thirty-two bring this section to its climax. Paul says that the union between man and woman, through becoming one flesh, is really about Jesus and His followers' oneness. The design of God creating two people to become one is meant to remind us of the true story we belong to; God becoming one with His creation. The longing of sex and a desire for union points us to a deeper longing to be reunited with the Creator. Isaiah writes, "As a young man marries a young woman, so will your

¹² Debi Pearl, *Created to Be His Help Meet : Discover How God Can Make Your Marriage Glorious* (Lobelville, Tn: No Greater Joy Ministries, 2014).

builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you” (Isa. 62:5). In other words, Paul is emphasizing that sexual intimacy serves as a signpost that we belong to God.

In another letter, Paul highlights the revelation of union between God and humanity through sexual intimacy. He commands the church at Corinth to flee from sexual immorality because it is a sin against their own body (1 Cor. 6:18-20). This is of utmost importance because Jesus’ followers have become a temple, the dwelling place, for Jesus’ Spirit to reside. The price for humanity to be reunified with God was the life of the Creator himself. The role God gave humanity from the beginning- to move creation along towards completion- had been halted because of their desire to seek life and wisdom apart from God. The significance of Jesus is that He restored humanity back to oneness with God and the ability to continue spreading His kingdom here on earth. For this reason, our bodies host the Creator himself and are not meant to be defiled by anything less than Jesus’ life. By living like this, we glorify the Father in our body (1 Cor. 6:20).

Paul’s advice is exactly how the early church won over the Roman Empire. Specifically, the early followers of Jesus died for what they believed in, radically gave their money in a world that did not have a category for their kind of kindness, and honorably lived in sexual fidelity. A third century letter titled the Letter to Diognetus, takes note of the unique behavior of Jewish Christians in a Roman centered world. It notes, “They marry, like everyone else, and they have children, but they do not destroy their offspring. They share a common table, but not a common bed. They exist in the flesh, but they do not live by the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.”¹³ Their acts of sexual faithfulness served as great witness to a

¹³ Lewis Bostock Radford, *The Epistle to Diognetus* (1908), 33-34.

foreign world. Loyal sexual intimacy brought healing and restoration in a world that used it for exploitation.

Jesus himself commented on the nature of sexuality in Matthew 5:27-30, saying “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” Jesus takes a very pragmatic law and reveals the transcendent set of values of which the written law code is an expression of.

For example, most everyone would agree that sexual abuse and exploitation for money is wrong and want it removed from this world. So does God. But Jesus actually takes it much more seriously than we do. We may want to get rid of sex trafficking, but Jesus wants to get rid of lust from His world by destroying one’s root desire to use another human being for their personal gratification. He did this by living a hell free existence and showed the world what it is like to actually be the kind of human that we are all made and called to be but perpetually failed to be. It was His life giving, other centered love that became so offensive and scandalous that He allowed the evils around Him to exhaust their power on Him, nailing Him on a tree. But when Jesus rose to life, He proved redemption for creation, His followers and their hearts, relationships, marriages, and sexuality. This is the kind of statement, paradigm shift, Jesus brings to life. The renewed heart that the prophets like Ezekiel (Ezek.36:26-27) and Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-33) only imagined would happen, become a reality through Jesus.

The danger of living in contrast to God's design for sexuality is quite severe. For a leader, once darkness creeps in it is hard to expose. Things that remain in darkness compound like a beast with a never seizing appetite. 50% of pastors admit to regularly looking at pornography (and possibly much more who are keeping it in darkness). With pornography use increasing the marital infidelity rate by more than 300%, church leaders, who are meant to be guides and shepherds to their flock (including marriage), end up becoming the wolves.¹⁴ Sexual immorality is eating the Church alive. Compromised leaders are more prone to abuse authority and lose the trust of their congregants, as well as their spouse. This has a massive effect on the community. Christian communities effected by sexual promiscuity of their leadership experience first-hand betrayal. Those who are new to following Jesus tend to associate their pastor with Jesus. If the pastor has abused his authority or led a life of sexual infidelity, a new believer is more prone to resent God. As a result, the church body typically becomes dysfunctional and fractures as a result.

I recommend five principles for protecting oneself from falling prey to any sexual expression outside of God's design. The first principle is to continually search one's hearts desires and surrender it to Him. As the Psalter writes, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test my thoughts. Point out anything you find in me that makes you sad, and lead me along the path of everlasting life" (Ps. 139:23-24, TLB). In Sam Black's book, *The Healing Church*, he looks at positive examples of churches that are the most successful in helping people overcome pornography. He identified that freedom was found not by having the right program or people in the right place, rather, it is about establishing the right culture that sought the heart of each person. He says, "Those cultures are focused on creating disciples who love God, live in

¹⁴ Kristina Robb-Dover.

authentic community, love one another, and serve and share their joy with others. It permeates everything these churches do, and their leaders are passionate about it.”¹⁵

Along with searching one’s heart, comes the second principle of continually identifying emotional ties/disconnects. In particular, a spouse should identify the “why” behind emotional closeness or separation from their spouse. If emotional distancing is identified in a spouse, get to the root cause of what is causing the separation. Most often sexual infidelity starts as a tiny seed of emotions that does not manifest into behavior until it has grown deep roots. For a single person, identify the motive of attachment to a particular person. Is it from a place of sacrificial love or motivated by self-gain?

Third, is the principle of valuing relational intimacy with fellow brothers in sisters in Christ. Paul talks about brotherly and sisterly love towards one another significantly more than marriage and sexuality. If we take our brotherly and sisterly relationship as seriously as Paul wants the Church to, then it would create an environment where loneliness (a leading factor for sexual promiscuity) is replaced by community and discipleship.

Fourth, prayerfully consider guardrails to prevent oneself from tempting and vulnerability circumstances. This could look like putting a computer in a public space and not allowing kids to take phones, tablets or laptops into personal and private spaces. Another application of this principle could be allowing someone to hold your internet activity accountable. Remember, the porn industry’s annual revenue is more than the NFL, NBA, and MLB combined. It is also more than the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.¹⁶ Let others share the burden and hold your internet searches accountable. There are many great applications that do a great job

¹⁵ Sam Black, *The Healing Church* (Morgan James Publishing, 2023), 197.

¹⁶ Kingdom Works Studios, “15 Mind-Blowing Statistics about Pornography and the Church,” [www.missionfrontiers.org](https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/15-mind-blowing-statistics-about-pornography-and-the-church), November 1, 2020, <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/15-mind-blowing-statistics-about-pornography-and-the-church>.

monitoring, reporting, and allowing friends and family to see all internet activity. Most times, the conversation through accountability checks seep to the heart quickest.

Lastly, place high value on the principle of open communication. Talking through sexuality in your life and the lives of your families, friends, and children. As noted earlier, sexual expression is only getting worse in the world. Trying to avoid the conversation is like failing to talk through rescue procedures in combat before conducting a mission in an improved explosive device (IED) stricken area. It is setting everyone up for failure. No matter how protected and sheltered people are, the enemy of the world is real and on attack. If parents are not going to initiate and form their children's perspective of sexual formation, culture will.

Now, I will lay out what I believe are five practical, concrete guidelines for Church ministries that will help avoid living outside God's design. Every counseling session a staff member has with another person should be documented, summarized, and signed by both (all) parties and saved. This will avoid everyone from feeling taken advantage of or falsely accused. Second, I see a great benefit of having a mixed gendered staff team. Besides the advantage of bringing someone to the table with a different point of view and perspective, it ensures that anyone who wants to meet with a specific gender can. With that, it still does not avoid when a member wants to meet directly with the head pastor who happens to be the opposite sex. In this scenario, staff should use an open door for all meetings involving mixed gendered. As far as the elder or lay leader of the church, it should be a standard operating procedure to have them only meet with others of the same sex. For this reason, I see it best to cultivate a church of mixed gendered leaders.

Third, I would encourage all church staff to have accountability teams where two people of the same gender meet once every other week to specifically share, prayer over and pray

through sexual brokenness that plagues the world and the church. This would be a good time to talk through specific difficulties or temptations they are facing personally or in their marriage, as well as any difficulties they may have faced in the past. Fourth, every church should have a very detailed and effective reporting structure for when sexual incidents do happen. As much as churches want to avoid situations by setting themselves up for success on the front end, sometimes bad people do bad things. Consequently, it is just as important to ensure a reporting structure and next steps plan is created and disseminated to all leaders. Not only would this require initial training, but also continued refresher courses on the correct reporting procedures.

My last guideline is to require all the church staff a day alone with God (DAWG). As Sam Black already pointed out, it is the culture of the church that draw one's heart to be moldable at the feet of Jesus that is most important. I see this starting from the leadership of the church all the way down to the littlest infant. A DAWG would be held every quarter in order to allow the staff to slow down, take a break from all their daily tasks all work and search their hearts. The goal of the DAWGs is to spend alone time with God seeking Him to expose sin, redeem hurt, refine motivations and magnifies righteousness.

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