



The Bible teaches us that God has reserved all forms of sexual activity as His gift to those who join to one another in marriage covenant relationship. As such, any sexual act performed before marriage is considered sexual immorality, is strictly prohibited and serious sin. Additionally, all extra-marital sexual activity that is physical, constitutes a capital crime¹.

“Scripture necessitates reserving any and all sexual activity for the marriage relationship. Or to state again, the New Testament conveys – both theologically and exegetically – that all premarital relationships are to be completely non-sexual... Our problem is not that we have failed to recognize the New Testament’s prohibition against premarital sexual activity; rather we have failed to fully reckon with the reality that there is more to sexual activity than intercourse. Oral sex, fondling, and mutual masturbation, for example, are all sexual activities. It is inconceivable that the New Testament’s ethic – insofar as it is an extension of the Torah – intends to leave room for such activities outside of marriage. Once we embrace the biblical ideal that sexual activity must be reserved for the marriage relationship, the question, ‘How far is too far?’ – a perennially vexing question for singles – is easily answered. If an activity is sexual, it is to be reserved for the marriage relationship.” – Gerald Hiestand (“Biblical-Theological Approach To Premarital Sexual Ethics: Or, What Would Paul Say About Making Out,” *Bulletin of Ecclesiastical Theology*)

“Sex outside of marriage is never moral. This includes all forms of intimate sexual stimulation that stir up sexual passion between unmarried partners.” – The Colorado Statement On Biblical Sexual Morality

1. Sexual activity – which includes all forms of sexual behavior, including but not limited to sexual intercourse, are the exclusive rights and divine gift of only those who have entered into an acceptable marriage covenant before God² (Gen 2:24-25 – “not ashamed” to give their naked beauty to one another and “the two become one flesh” – a statement referring to marriage; 1Co 7:1-5 = The place for sexual relations is marriage).

2. The reason for such exclusivity is the fact that all sex/sexual acts are marriage-making or ratifying acts. IOW: They are meant to result in or confirm the existence of a marriage covenant. That is their primary intention (Deu 22:21 = B/C there was sexual activity, there is assumption/obligation that marriage will result between those individuals; 1Co 6:16 = You are doing marriage-making acts w/someone you will not marry).

3. The words (πορνεία/πόρνος = pornography) translated in the New Testament as “sexual immorality” or “immorality”:

3.1. In the most general sense, refer to the act of giving your (sexual/naked) beauty to someone other than your spouse (see Eze 16:15 – “whorings” = πορνεία)

3.2. Were terms used in first century to refer to **all** extra-marital sexual activity (kissing, fondling, masturbation, intercourse, pornography, illicit sexual thought or conversations, etc)³

3.3. Looking upon (or exposing) the nakedness of oneself (or others) unsanctioned to view such nakedness (or for unauthorized sexual purposes), was therefore also prohibited by God as a form of sexual immorality⁴.

¹ The designation, physical is necessary to distinguish such activity from that which is only mental or “in the heart” (Mat 5:27). Like murder, sexual crimes which are capital in nature relate only to those that involve physical activity.

² The only marriages acceptable and recognized by God are covenant relationships established between a man and a woman for the purpose of sharing life and sexual intimacy. Though marriage can assume other purposes (e.g. the propagation of the race/family), this is not the primary reason God gave it to man (see Gen 2:18-24). The entirety of this paper assumes this as the definition of marriage.

³ “In both the ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, sexual immorality would have included any kind of sexual activity between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman... Πορνεία was a catch-all word used to reference any kind of sexual activity outside the bounds of proper sexual conduct. In Paul’s day avoiding πορνεία would have entailed avoiding any kind of sexual activity – even light sexual activity – between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman...When the biblical authors wrote, ‘Abstain from sexual immorality,’ their hearers knew exactly what they meant. In the first century context, appropriate conduct meant treating members of the opposite sex in a completely non-sexual way. For further analysis of πορνεία or πόρνος see Raymond Collins, *Ethics and the New Testament: Behavior and Belief*, or William Loader, *Sexuality and the New Testament: Understanding the Key Texts*.

⁴ The Bible makes it clear that we are not to look upon the nudity of persons involved in sexual acts or for sexual purposes, unless those individuals are our legitimate spouses. Any exposure outside of that context, is considered serious sin by our God (Lev 18:1-20). This would include viewing any depictions thereof (e.g. paintings, photography, sculptures, etc.) since this too is at the heart of God’s Levitical prohibition. The reason for such prohibition is because such activity violates the biblical principle established in Genesis 2:25 (“the man and his wife were both naked [yet] unashamed.”). In the context of sex, nakedness is a state reserved only for those in marriage covenant relationship with one another. And given man’s fall into sin, such displays are no longer appropriate in the public setting. Hence the reason for Adam and Eve’s response in covering themselves after their “eyes were open” to their sin (Gen 3:1-7). Without surprise, this prohibition (no public displays/exposure of nudity – most especially sexual nudity) and its remedy (the removal of such nudity from public viewing or unauthorized parties through clothing), becomes the predominant picture used in the Scriptures to teach both

4. Both terms represent that which is always condemned by God (e.g. Mat 5:32, 19:9; Mar 7:21; Joh 8:41; Act 15:29; 1Co 5:1, 9-11, 6:9, 13, 18, 7:2; 2Co 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:5; Col 3:5; 1Th 4:3; 1Ti 1:10; Heb 12:16; Rev 2:21, 14:8, 17:2, 4, 19:2, 22:15).
5. The Judaism of Jesus' day taught that marriage is the only allowable outlet for men and women to express their sexuality. "Bli yadayim" (hands off) is the term used by orthodox Jews today to describe this practice/prohibition.
6. Those activities considered (sexually) inappropriate between biological relatives are equally considered (in Scripture) to be inappropriate activities between individuals who are not married. In other words, God sees such actions as sexually immoral (Gen 26:8-9; "laughing w/" = lit. caressing/fondling; Notice – Abimelech immediately concludes that such activity must mean Isaac and Rebekah are married – an assumption not refuted by Isaac or the text; 1Ti 5:2).
7. This is why there is no distinction within Scripture between kissing or sexual intercourse. It is either sexually immoral or sexually pure with the determining factor being who it is with (versus) what act is taking place (1Th 4:3-6 – Notice, the issue is not *what* [what kind of sexual act has been performed?], but *who* [who has been wronged?]).
8. All sexual activity symbolizes Christ's relationship to His Church (Eph 5:22-32). This too confirms such activity as restricted to marriage since Christ has no intimacy of any kind with those who are not His Bride (or Church).
9. When God's people participate in extra-marital sexual activity with pagans, they are also guilty of idolatry (sexual idolatry - i.e. creating a spiritual bond to the false gods of those persons; Num 25:1ff [LXX = ἐκπορεύω = indulge in sexual immorality – Jud 1:7] w/1Co 10:8 w/1Co 6:15-20 = sexual activity equals spiritual activity; see also 2Co 6:14-7:1 w/12:21 – Notice [7:1], "defilement of body *and* spirit" = both are defiled in sexual immorality)⁵.
10. 1Corinthians 7:16 reveals another reason extra-marital sexual activity is sin: it is an attempt to unite households without the necessary covenant or consent of the householders (i.e. the parents/father). In this respect, it is also an act of rebellion against ones' parents (i.e. dishonoring your father and mother) whose household a person belongs to until marriage (Rut 1:8; Consider also - Jesus' submission to His mother even at 30 yrs of age – Joh 2:3-7).
11. In ancient times, the economic benefit and severe consequences associated with providing a virgin bride kept Jewish fathers from allowing their daughters into environments where there was any possibility of pre-marital sexual activity (e.g. Deu 22:13-21). As such, this reveals (and further re-enforces) the kind of precautionary measures God expects will be taken to avoid sexual sin (Mat 5:27-30 = The sin being referred to is masturbation. Consider what Jesus prescribes as the means to avoiding even this form of sexual immorality.)⁶
12. Considering Jesus' teaching on our eternal state in heaven (i.e. celibate – Mat 22:30) provides yet additional support to the prohibition of any sexual activity before marriage since everyone assumes that to also be what Jesus is inferring by such words. In other words, because there will be no marriage in heaven, there will also be no sexual activity whatsoever (i.e. the angels don't make out, masturbate or fondle one another).

the doctrines of Sin and Redemption. Public nakedness (again, that most associated with sex), becomes the metaphor for condemnation and sin; and God's covering of such nakedness, the metaphor for His gracious redemption. For example: 1)(Genesis 3:21) = The analogous link between covering and redemption, exposed nakedness and sin is both affirmed and established by God in clothing Adam and Eve with the carcass of their atoning sacrifice, (Ezekiel 16:1-36) = Upon finding Israel "naked" and at the "age for love" (i.e. at sexual maturity), God immediately "covers" her. According to Ezekiel, this is what is necessary if she is to be brought into "covenant" relationship with Him. As such, her nakedness represents her prior state in sin, and God's actions in clothing her, His redemptive response (1-8). That her nakedness -or more specifically the public exposure of her nakedness in a sexual way, indeed represents her prior sinful state, is further emphasized by the fact that when Israel rebels, she is viewed as returning to her state of public nakedness (15-36), (Revelation 19:8) = The church in her glorified state will be transferred to the heavenly Eden not as unclothed but clothed. The symbolism represented by such covering will continue for all eternity as the new picture of sinless perfection. Though these examples are indeed employing metaphor, they carry no force unless the literary device itself is based in reality. In other words, for public nakedness (especially in relation to sex) to be used as the picture for sin, it must (in reality) carry that moral association. The same can be said about those who have received God's gracious redemption. The expression of this reality in their lives therefore *includes* the removal (and condemnation) of public nudity and any accompanying sexual activity. This no doubt is what the author of Hebrews is alluding to when he speaks of "keeping the marriage bed pure". As before, the place for exposing such things has now been relegated to the privacy (and prying eyes) of our spouses alone. As such, anyone involved in the public display of nudity or sexual acts with nudity is acting in rebellious reversal of these very truths. They are guilty of pornography - which by definition, is this very thing – the public display of sexual nudity. Calling it "art" does not change that. Ancient versions of pornography or pornographic graffiti were always condemned by the Jews as the expressions of a pagan society cursed by God. It was this distinction (the condemnation of nudity in art) that identified those countries affected by the Reformation and those which had not. Italy, Poland, France and other nations who remained staunchly Roman Catholic, continued to paint nudes, whereas places like Germany, Switzerland and England showed considerable restraint. The light of God's transforming Word had changed not only what they viewed as art, but as righteous and good.

⁵ In the case of Christians already married to pagans, Paul makes it clear that this principle no longer applies as the unbelieving spouse is "sanctified" by the believing spouse (see 1Co 7:14).

⁶ "Indeed, the ability of a respectable young woman to find a suitable partner was, in no small part, contingent upon her father's ability to prove her chastity. Since a daughter's contribution to the family was often found in her ability to secure a socially or economically advantageous marriage, a father in the ancient world typically took great pains to protect the moral integrity of her reputation until the day of her marriage...Respectable young women, even in the pagan culture, did not spend time alone with males who were not part of their 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 more social license to visit prostitutes to take a mistress.)" – G. Hiestand (*Sex, Dating and Relationships*)

13. Paul's response to those experiencing strong sexual desire: Get married (1Co 7:7-9)! Never then, the exercising of our passions in any form of extra-marital sexual activity (1Co 7:1 – "not to have sexual relations" = lit. not to touch, as in sexually)⁷.

14. Paul's response to those exercising their passions in some form of extra-marital sexual activity: Stop it/Flee from it or go to Hell (1Co 6:9-10, 18 – "Flee" [φεύγω, "fugitive"] = to seek safety through putting distance between you and the danger, e.g. Act 27:30; see also Eph 5:5-7).

15. The Old Testament phrase, "lies with" (e.g. Exo 22:19) is a figure of speech referring to all physical (i.e. touching one's body or the body of another)⁸ sexual activity and not simply sexual intercourse. This can be easily surmised by considering that:

15.1. A literal understanding of the phrase proves both salacious (i.e. God cares about sexual positions) - even non-sensical (e.g. Consider: Lev 18:22, 20:13 -How does a man have vaginal intercourse with another man?)

15.2. Scripture bears evidence of using a different phrase (e.g. "goes in to her") when referring specifically to sexual intercourse in a context that also uses "lies with". Hence confirming the broader the scope of this phrase (Deu 22:13-15 w/22-29).

16. The fact that all sex and sexual activities are marriage-making/ratifying acts is what also makes them an even more serious sin for Christians if marriage is not the end result. IOW: If they are not making/ratifying marriage, they are breaking it in adultery (adultery in our physical marriage as well as adultery to our spiritual marriage – Mat 5:31-32; Hos 2:1-3 w/4:12-14) Hence why all deviant forms of physical⁹ sexual activity (πορνεία) - not just intercourse (i.e. adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, sexual-idolatry, whoring, non-spousal masturbation¹⁰), qualify as a capital crime (Lev 20:10, 13, 15-16; Deu 13:1-4; 1Co 6:15-20 w/Num 25:1-3 and 2Co 6:14-18; Deu 22:21; Mat 5:27-30).

⁷"For Paul the marriage relationship is the only legitimate context for satisfying one's sexual passions. Paul not only recommends marriage as a bulwark against sexual temptation, but in fact commands it (note Paul's use of the imperative form of "to marry" in verse 9). Failure to seek legitimate means of sexual release places oneself in harm's way, and creates temptation toward illegitimate sexual activity. Those who have a strong desire for sexual intimacy must not continue to 'burn' indefinitely, not seek to quench that burning in illegitimate ways outside the marriage bounds. The sexual ethic is clear: sexual activity is to be reserved for the marriage relationship." – G Hiestand ("Biblical-Theological Approach To Premarital Sexual Ethics: Or, What Would Paul Say About Making Out," *Bulletin of Ecclesiastical Theology*).

⁸ Viewing pornography, possessing illicit sexual thoughts, participating in illicit sexual conversations, etc would not fit into this category since no physical contact has been made w/one's own body or the body of another. This is further strengthened by the penalty God exacted on those who wrongfully viewed another's nakedness (see Fn 4, and Lev 18:1-20).

⁹ Illicit sexual thoughts are indeed sin but not sexual immorality (or πορνεία). The term (as discussed) refers only to physical activity (not mental). Such sin is instead coveting according to Exo 20:17. For those considering Jesus' words regarding "lustful intent" as a form of adultery of the heart (Mat 5:28), the remaining verses (most esp. v30) make it clear that what He is referring to is very much physical in nature. IOW: it is more than just fantasizing. The individual is using such thoughts are intended to fuel to solo sexual act he is now carrying out w/his "hand" (i.e. masturbation).

¹⁰ See Hands Off! (Bli Yadayim!), R. Scott Jarret, 2015, for a more in depth discussion on the subject of immoral (non-spousal) masturbation and Mat 5:27-30 as support for it as a capital crime.