

No Sex Please, We're Adventists

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When I began writing this article, the thought crossed my mind, 'Aren't there more important things to write about?' But having recently spent some time addressing a youth group on healthy relationships and sexual purity, I quickly dismissed the question. Sex is a topic that everybody wrestles with, but few are willing to talk about. In light of the fact that this is an area in which the Enemy has so much success ensnaring Christians, we have to talk about it.

When God performed the first marriage in the Garden of Eden, He created an institution which is designed to spiritually, emotionally and physically unite a man and women, in a covenantal relationship between themselves and their Creator. Marriage is a covenant relationship. Throughout the history of mankind, God has dealt with His people within the context of covenant relationships, each covenant carrying with it a sign. The marriage covenant also has a sign which is sexual union. Therefore, any sexual activity outside of marriage claims covenant privileges without covenant commitment and cannot fulfil the purpose for which it was created.

While God gave Adam & Eve instructions to "go forth and multiply", procreation was never the only purpose for sex. The sexual experience is not pleasurable by accident. God intended that sexual union also provide intimacy, companionship and trust. Modern neuroscientific research demonstrates that sex triggers the release of the neurochemicals, dopamine, oxytocin and vasopressin which stimulate physical changes in the brain which enable couples not only to experience intense pleasure, but also to bond.

The very first reference to sex in the Bible states, "Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain . . . (Genesis 4:1). The New Testament also refers to sex in this manner. Speaking of Joseph we read that he ". . . did not *know* her [Mary] till she had brought forth her firstborn Son (Matthew 1:25). But we also read in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." It is deeply significant that both the Old and New Testaments use the word 'know' and 'knew' to refer to sexual union. Especially since the same Greek word in the New Testament, *ginosko*, is used to refer both to sexual union and the intimate union a believer enjoys with Christ which constitutes salvation. The Apostle Paul emphasizes this reality when he states, ". . . the two will become one flesh. ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32). The 'one flesh' does not refer merely to sexual intimacy, but includes spiritual, emotional and intellectual union. Any act which separates sex from the rest of an individual's personhood or humanity reduces sex to a level beneath the dignity with which mankind was created.

We are called to sexual purity, which may be defined as using the members of our body the way God intended. This includes our minds, eyes, hands, mouths and sex organs. Paul states, "That each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do

not know God (1 Thess. 4:4, 5, NIV). Sexual purity has often been confused with sexual abstinence, but they are not the same thing. The goal for Christians is not just to remain virgins until marriage. Abstinence may be a by-product of purity, but purity involves much more. The Bible makes it clear that purity is a matter of the mind. Jesus said, “. . . whoever looks at a woman *to lust* for her he has committed adultery already with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). It is possible to be both abstinent and sexually impure at the same time.

It is also possible to be married, having physical sex only with one's spouse and be sexually impure. In Matthew 5:28 Jesus speaks of adultery not fornication. While the principle of purity applies to both, adultery is committed by married people. Ellen White also comments,

Men and women, you will one day learn what is lust and the result of its gratification. Passion of just as base a quality may be found in the marriage relation as outside of it (The Adventist Home, 124).

Just because a couple are married, it does not mean that ‘anything goes.’ As we have already seen, sex is designed to serve a holy purpose. Sex between married couples which is engaged simply for selfish gratification does not fulfil God's purpose for the sexual act. 1 Corinthians 7:3 states, “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.” The affection due a spouse is founded on the principle of agapé love in which each puts the needs of the other before self. The Bible teaches that husbands and wives should not deprive one another of normal healthy sexual relations (see 1 Cor. 7:5). However, sex should always be a freewill gift of love, not a right taken on demand. To reiterate the point, purity is a matter of the mind. The mindset of a husband or wife who ‘uses’ their spouse for sex is little different from that of a ‘punter’ who uses a prostitute. Selfish gratification, not mutual love is the goal in both cases.

1 Corinthians 6:13 states,

Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body . . . Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

The purpose of a temple is to facilitate worship. In the Old Testament sanctuary service, the priests could not enter the temple unless they went through a service of purification (Exodus 30:20). There is a principle here which is applicable to the maintenance of sexual purity. No-one should have access to the temple of our bodies unless they are consecrated and we should not touch another person sexually unless we are consecrated. If we are consecrated, then we will not violate the sexual boundaries that God has put in place or the purpose for which sex was given.

It is the inadequate understanding of God's purpose for sexual union which leads to the view that Christians should not have sex on Sabbath. Christians' view of the sex has to a great degree been tainted by the distorted theology of the early Church Fathers who taught that sex between a husband and wife was a ‘necessary evil’. Too often, the church has been complicit in allowing the Enemy to turn the

divine blessing of sex into a dirty act for which we should be ashamed. Using the prohibition of not 'doing your pleasure on My Holy day' (Isaiah 58:13), if carried to its logical conclusion would preclude us from doing anything on the Sabbath which we find pleasurable, eating, singing, walking in nature etc. etc. Marriage is holy, sex is holy, Sabbath is holy. Why would it be wrong to do a holy thing on a holy day with a holy motive? Obviously, there may be practical reasons why a married couple would abstain from sex on the Sabbath, but it should not be due to faulty theology. The only sex which is wrong on the Sabbath is that which does not fulfill the purpose for which it was created, marital or otherwise.

Sex is God's precious gift to married couple's. If we keep the fire in the fireplace, we will not burn the house down.