

Abstinence

by Sebastian R. Fama

The practice of saving sex for marriage is not as popular as it once was. Despite this, I think that most men and women, at least subconsciously, believe that fornication (sex outside of marriage) is wrong. The standard defense for having sex outside of marriage is usually a variation of the following: "There's nothing wrong with sleeping with **someone you really love**." Curiously, the same men who say this to their girlfriends say the opposite to their sisters and daughters. The idea that it is okay for men but not for their daughters and sisters is nonsensical. Men do not want the women they care about fornicating because they know from their own experience that it is wrong.

To **really love someone**, you must really know them. This takes time and a clear mind. The promise of sex at the end of a date can cloud one's thinking. This is not at all conducive to a couple getting to really know each other. Perhaps you might be saying, "But I really do love this person." If that is the case you should not be afraid to proclaim your love publicly and to commit yourself to that person. Which, by the way, is what we call marriage. Which do you think represents "**real love**" – sleeping with someone, or committing your life to them?

In an attempt to refute the Church's position on pre-marital sex, a woman once said to me: "It's not like I am sleeping with a lot of men." This statement is totally irrelevant, but very telling. Whether an act is right or wrong has nothing to do with how many times it is done. A woman would only know that fornicating with many men is wrong if she first knew that fornicating with one is wrong.

Can the man who only robbed one person claim he is no thief because he didn't rob a lot of people? Of course not! Stealing from a lot of people is certainly worse than stealing from one person, but stealing is stealing. An act is wrong because of its intrinsic nature. Repetition just makes it worse. Extremes, in cases like this, do not establish principles. They only act as a magnifying glass. And when you look at something through a magnifying glass, it is hard to deny what it is.

Sex is addictive. With each new partner less discernment is used. It becomes easier and easier to cross the line. The act, rather than being a profound expression of love, becomes an end unto itself. Sexual desire easily becomes lust. This in turn causes the other person to become more an object and less of a person. The thrill of the moment takes priority over the long-term effects of our actions.

Everywhere you look fornication is portrayed as normal behavior. Movies, television, magazines, and so-called school health clinics reinforce the idea that sex outside of marriage is natural and even to be expected. But ideas lead to actions. And actions have consequences. Sexual actions have consequences on several levels. They affect us physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

Physical Effects – There are some thirty-seven sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Some of them are incurable and some are deadly. Society's answer to this problem is "Safe Sex." Just give people condoms, and they can go about having safe sex thus eliminating unwanted pregnancies and deadly STDs. Unfortunately, this solution has more to do with ideology than reality. "Focus on the Family" noted in a newspaper ad the results of 25 years of "Safe Sex" ideology. They wrote:

Ten percent of all 15 to 19-year-old females become pregnant each year (*Kids Having Kids*, A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing, June 1996, p 1).

More than 80 percent of pregnant girls under age 17 who give birth and keep their babies end up on welfare, costing society a staggering \$21 billion a year (*ibid*, 20).

Three million new cases of STDs among teens are reported each year (Division of STD Prevention. *The Challenge of STD Prevention in the United States*, available at http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/STD_Prevention_in_the_United_States.htm)

Up to 29 percent of sexually active adolescent girls have been found to be infected with Chlamydia (Alan Guttmacher Inst. *Facts in Brief (Sexually Transmitted Diseases in the United States)* Sept. 1993).

A study of sexually active college women showed that 43 percent acquired HPV infection within a 3-year period (Ho, Gloria Y.F., et. al., "*Natural History of Cervicovaginal Papillomavirus infection in Young Women*," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Feb. 12, 1998, Vol. 338, Number 7, p 442).

The physical effects of sex are not limited to just pregnancy and STDs. According to Health Canada: "You are more likely to develop cervical cancer if you have multiple sexual partners or if you become sexually active at an early age. Early sexual activity is believed to increase the risk because during puberty, cervical tissue undergoes many changes that might make the area more vulnerable to damage."

Individuals who seek to be married hope for the ideal partner. Someone who will love and cherish them for life. No sane person would think of choosing a husband or wife while intoxicated. And yet, this sort of thing is quite common. I say this sort of thing because drugs and alcohol are not the only substances that can impair your judgment. In an article on Chastity, Mary Beth Bonnacci talks about yet another physical effect. She writes:

Hormonally, sexual arousal and intercourse set off a chain reaction designed to keep married couples bound together. Women experience a flood of oxytocin – the same hormone which they produce in labor and in nursing a baby. Oxytocin causes a woman to be forgetful, decreases her ability to think rationally – and causes an incredibly strong emotional attachment to form with the man she is with.

Bottom line: if you are trying to get to know someone, and you are sleeping with them, your judgment will be impaired. Those intense feelings that you feel are not love. They are the effects of bonding. Thus, you may end up with someone you would otherwise reject. This can cause you and any children that may come along a great deal of pain when the relationship disintegrates. Statistics bear this out as the ranks of the fatherless continues to grow.

Psychological Effects – It is not unusual for individuals who engage in casual sex to become plagued with regrets. The Heritage Foundation found that about 25% of sexually active girls say they are depressed all, most, or a lot of the time while only 8% of girls who are not sexually active feel the same way. Low self-esteem, promiscuity and even suicide are other problems that can develop.

Spiritual Effects – Christianity has always taught that fornication is illicit behavior. Some try to get around this by saying: "Isn't God a God of Love? Doesn't He love us just the way we are?" Yes, God loves us, but that does not mean that He approves of everything we do. The same Bible that tells us of God's incredible love for us in John 3:16, also calls fornication evil in Mark 7:21-23. And it is also the same Bible that tells us that fornicators will be outside the city in Revelation 22:15. Just for the record, the city spoken of here is heaven.

For those who have succumbed to the addictive nature of fornication, all is not lost. God's grace can restore you. Not only does God offer us forgiveness but healing as well. As the Scripture says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Recent studies illustrate the superiority of Christian Sexual ethics. One study found that non-married men and women report significantly higher rates of sexual dysfunction than do married men and women (*Sexual Dysfunction in the United States, Prevalence and Predictors*, Edward O. Laumann, et. al.).

Another study found that married couples have the best and most satisfying sex (both physically and emotionally). The study also found that enjoyment was greatest when there was only one sexual partner in a lifetime (*The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*, Edward O. Laumann, et. al., table 10.5, p 364).

Abstinence before marriage and fidelity after marriage is the only sure way to avoid STDs. Combine that with the results of our two surveys, and it is easy to see that adhering to Christian sexual ethics is the best way to achieve safe sex and great sex. And isn't that what everybody wants?