

speaks against divorce, identifies adultery as having broad, harmful effects on the marriage relationship and compares lust to adultery (Matt. 5:27-32).

Jesus declares a high view of sexuality and sexual expression. The Bible clarifies the purity of marriage and exposes sensuality and lust as cheap imitations. Through Christ's redemptive power, men and women can experience (though imperfectly in this life) the restoration of God's intentional design for sexual expression.

The Bible declares that expressions of sexual intimacy outside the bounds of marriage between a man and a woman are sin. Pre-marital, extra-marital, group, adult/child, animal and same-sex sexual intimacy are all out of bounds for the follower of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:26-32). Yet God's wonderful grace and forgiveness are extended to those who have placed their faith in him. God's plan is that repentance frees his forgiveness to flow and then life change follows.

Followers of Jesus can be released from the bondage of sexual sin. Old habits and former sins need not be repeated thanks to the power of God that is at work within us (1 Cor. 6:9-11). While temptations persist and people may experience strong desires and inclination toward sinful sexual behavior, there is hope. Extensive Christian counseling may be required in some cases, as the impact of deviation from God's design can be significant and profound. Though the power of sin is strong, the power of the Holy Spirit is stronger.

{ The best way }

It is important for churches to speak more openly about the Bible's teaching in this regard, especially in youth groups but also for the whole congregation. Precisely because sexual practice is experienced in private, we need to speak more openly about its opportunities and dangers.

We also need to make clear that while the Bible has a high view of sex, it never presents intimate sexual expression as the highest good nor as something essential for a fulfilled life. Both Jesus and Paul affirm celibacy for singles as an appropriate and God-honoring alternative to marriage (Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:25-28). As Richard Hays writes: "The love of God is far more important than any human love. Sexual fulfillment finds its place, at best, as a subsidiary good within this larger picture" (*The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 391).

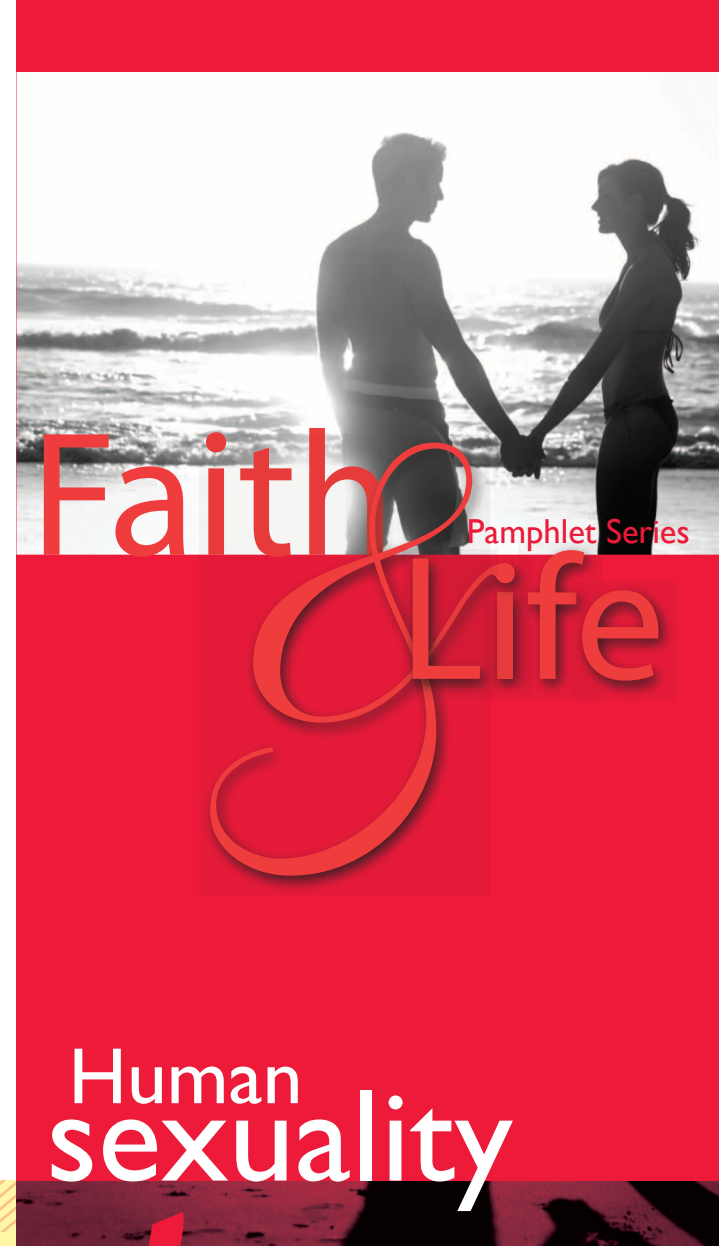
In a sexually permissive society, it is becoming more difficult to hold to the high biblical calling with regard to sexual practice. Because we believe God's way is the right and best way for Christ-followers to live, we call for obedience to Jesus in the pursuit of holiness and sexual purity.

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Sexuality was God's idea. God created humanity as male and female with sexual desires. Intimate sexual expression is one of God's good gifts and an essential aspect of propagating the human race (Gen. 1:27-28). Along with the gift of sexuality, God gave guidelines and instructions designed to safeguard it as a good gift so that sexuality can be practiced according to God's will.

As with all God's gifts, sexuality can become destructive if misused. When this happens, people miss the mark of God's intentions. The Bible calls this sin. Sex is one gift that has been misused in ways that do violence to people, trivializes it and produces consequences God never intended. So it is essential that we resist some current trends in sexuality and recommit ourselves to what the Bible teaches.

Sex permeates our culture. Television, the Internet, movies and even text messages are sometimes saturated with an open sexuality. The culture blasts a message that sexuality is only about what feels right at a given moment. Sensuality, physical attraction and pleasure seem to be the only necessary ingredients to a satisfying sex life. Current United States realities are that 80 percent of unmarried individuals have had sex, 30 percent have experienced unwanted pregnancy and over 1 million of those are aborted every year.

{ **God's design** }

As followers of Jesus, we proclaim a message about human sexuality that has often been characterized as prudish, unrealistic and unnecessarily restrictive. However, the biblical vision of human sexual expression is quite different from these stereotypes. God's design for human intimacy is full of love, joy, pleasure and deep satisfaction.



God created men and women in his image. God declares both male and female persons to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31). By creating humans as sexual beings, God designed more than a physiological process by which the earth may be filled through procreation. Likewise, while Creator-God has designed sexual intimacy to be a pleasurable and mutually satisfying experience, the significance of sexual expression goes beyond mere physical pleasure. Sexual between a husband and wife united in a marriage covenant is intended to be symbolic of the union that God intends to last for a lifetime.

When sin entered the human experience, the first man and woman felt shame and nakedness and responded by covering themselves (Gen. 3:7). God's

perfect intent was seriously damaged. What God intended as a pure and uninhibited expression of covenant union, love and intimacy is no longer that simple. Sin has wreaked havoc on the human sexual experience. Sexual exploitation, inappropriate use of power, lust, abuse and selfishness are examples of the impact of sexual sin on the human race.

{ **What Jesus teaches** }

Christ Jesus came to announce the good news of redemption, to reclaim the original plan and to set believers on the path to restoration. Jesus elevates the value of women and condemns sexual selfishness. Jesus teaches that marriage is permanent,

“Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

