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The Seduction of Pornography and the Integrity of Christian Marriage, Part Two



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The Christian worldview must direct all consideration of sexuality to the institution of marriage. Marriage is not merely the arena for sexual activity, it is presented in Scripture as the divinely-designed arena for the display of God's glory on earth as a man and a wife come together in a one-flesh relationship within the marriage covenant. Rightly understood and rightly ordered, marriage is a picture of God's own covenantal faithfulness. Marriage is to display God's glory, reveal God's good gifts to His creatures, and protect human beings from the inevitable disaster that follows when sexual passions are divorced from their rightful place.



The marginalization of marriage, and the open antipathy with which many in the culture elite approach the question of marriage, produces a context in which Christians committed to a marriage ethic appear hopelessly out of step with the larger culture. Whereas marriage is seen as a privatized contract to be made and unmade at will in the larger society, Christians must see marriage as an inviolable covenant made before God and man, that establishes both temporal and eternal realities.

Christians have no right to be embarrassed when it comes to talking about sex and sexuality. An unhealthy reticence or embarrassment in dealing with these issues is a form of disrespect to God's creation. Whatever God made is good, and every good thing God made has an intended purpose that ultimately reveals His own glory. When conservative Christians respond to sex with ambivalence or embarrassment, we slander the goodness of God and hide God's glory which is intended to be revealed in the right use of creation's gifts.

Therefore, our first responsibility is to point all persons toward the right use of God's good gifts and the legitimacy of sex in marriage as one vital aspect of God's intention in marriage from the beginning.

Many individuals—especially young men—hold a false expectation of what sex represents within the marriage relationship. Since the male sex drive is largely directed towards genital pleasure, men often assume that women are just the same. While physical pleasure is certainly an essential part of the female experience of sex, it is not as focused on the solitary goal of genital fulfillment as is the case with many men.

A biblical worldview understands that God has demonstrated His glory in both the sameness and the differences that mark men and women, male and female. Alike made in the image of God, men and women are literally made *for* each other. The physicality of the male and female bodies cries out for fulfillment in the other. The sex drive calls both men and women out of themselves and toward a covenantal relationship which is consummated in a one-flesh union.

By definition, sex within marriage is not merely the accomplishment of sexual fulfillment on the part of two individuals who happen to share the same bed. Rather, it is the mutual self-giving that reaches pleasures both physical and spiritual. The emotional aspect of sex cannot be divorced from the physical dimension of the sex act. Though men are often tempted to forget this, women possess more and less gentle means of making that need clear.

Consider the fact that a woman has every right to expect that her husband will earn access to the marriage bed. As the Apostle Paul states, the husband and wife no longer own their own bodies, but each now belongs to the other. At the same time, Paul instructed men to love their wives even as Christ has loved the church. Even as wives are commanded to submit to the authority of their husbands, the husband is called to a far higher standard of Christ-like love and devotion toward the wife.

Therefore, when I say that a husband must regularly “earn” privileged access to the marital bed, I mean that a husband owes his wife the confidence, affection, and emotional support that would lead her to freely give herself to her husband in the act of sex.

God's gift of sexuality is inherently designed to pull us out of ourselves and toward our spouse. For men, this means that marriage calls us out of our self-focused concern for genital pleasure and toward the totality of the sex act within the marital relationship.

Put most bluntly, I believe that God means for a man to be civilized, directed, and stimulated toward marital faithfulness by the fact that his wife will freely give herself to him sexually only when he presents himself as worthy of her attention and desire.

Perhaps specificity will help to illustrate this point. I am confident that God's glory is seen in the fact that a married man, faithful to his wife, who loves her genuinely, will wake up in the morning driven by ambition and passion in order to make his wife proud, confident, and assured in her devotion to her husband. A husband who looks forward to sex with his wife will aim his life toward those things that will bring rightful pride to her heart, will direct himself to her with love as the foundation of their relationship, and will present himself to her as a man in whom she can take both pride and satisfaction.

Consider these two pictures. The first picture is of a man who has set himself toward a commitment to sexual purity, and is living in sexual integrity with his wife. In order to fulfill his wife's rightful expectations and to maximize their mutual pleasure in the marriage bed, he is careful to live, to talk, to lead, and to love in such a way that his wife finds her fulfillment in giving herself to him in love. The sex act then becomes a fulfillment of their entire relationship, not an isolated physical act that is merely incidental to their love for each other. Neither uses sex as means of manipulation, neither is inordinately focused merely on self-centered personal pleasure, and both give themselves to each other in unapologetic and unhindered sexual passion. In this picture, there is no shame. Before God, this man can be confident that he is fulfilling his responsibilities both as a *male* and as a *man*. He is directing his sexuality, his sex drive, and his physical embodiment toward the one-flesh relationship that is the perfect paradigm of God's intention in creation.

By contrast, consider another man. This man lives alone, or at least in a context other than holy marriage. Directed inwardly rather than outwardly, his sex drive has become an engine for lust and self-gratification. Pornography is the essence of his sexual interest and arousal. Rather than taking satisfaction in his wife, he looks at dirty pictures in order to be rewarded with sexual arousal that comes without responsibility, expectation, or demand. Arrayed before him are a seemingly endless variety of naked women, sexual images of explicit carnality, and a cornucopia of perversions intended to seduce the imagination and corrupt the soul.

This man need not be concerned with his physical appearance, his personal hygiene, or his moral character in the eyes of a wife. Without this structure and accountability, he is free to take his sexual pleasure without regard for his unshaved face, his slothfulness, his halitosis, his body odor, and his physical appearance. He faces no requirement of personal

respect, and no eyes gaze upon him in order to evaluate the seriousness and worthiness of his sexual desire. Instead, his eyes roam across the images of unblinking faces, leering at women who make no demands upon him, who never speak back, and who can never say no. There is no exchange of respect, no exchange of love, and nothing more than the using of women as sex objects for his individual and inverted sexual pleasure.

These two pictures of male sexuality are deliberately intended to drive home the point that every man must decide who he will be, whom he will serve, and how he will love. In the end, a man's decision about pornography is a decision about his soul, a decision about his marriage, a decision about his wife, and a decision about God.

Pornography is a slander against the goodness of God's creation and a corruption of this good gift God has given his creatures out of his own self-giving love. To abuse this gift is to weaken, not only the institution of marriage, but the fabric of civilization itself. To choose lust over love is to debase humanity and to worship the false god Priapus in the most brazen form of modern idolatry.

The deliberate use of pornography is nothing less than the willful invitation of illicit lovers and objectified sex objects and forbidden knowledge into a man's heart, mind, and soul. The damage to the man's heart is beyond measure, and the cost in human misery will only be made clear on the Day of Judgment. From the moment a boy reaches puberty until the day he is lowered into the ground, every man will struggle with lust. Let us follow the biblical example and scriptural command that we make a covenant with our eyes lest we sin. In this society, we are called to be nothing less than a corps of the mutually accountable amidst a world that lives as if it will never be called to account.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler

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