

## The Marriage Bed

The modern church goes out of its way to never talk about sex under any circumstances. It is very unlikely that you are ever going to hear a sermon about it. Sex is treated like some sort of forbidden topic that must never be mentioned or discussed. This comment (posted anonymously online) sums up the problem pretty well:

Most churches ... do not speak about sex or if ever then only very briefly and as if “oops I actually mentioned some sexual sins in a long list of many but everyone now must pretend they were yawning when I mentioned this and it flew past their ears”. The reason is probably that people bring their children with them to church and the church tries to be this superficially family friendly place, like an U rated movie. ... Most churches are stuck to Sunday School level of preaching, speaking as if people were children concerned with petty childish sins, and topics concerning sexuality or any difficult theological questions are treated as something very complex that require a special time and place to be discussed, but that time and place is never and nowhere.

The problem with this approach is that the Bible has quite a lot to say about this topic, and (given the sinful world we live in) what it has to say is important. We must not neglect what the Word of God has to say about *any* topic, and this is no exception.

Given the size of this topic it is impossible to address everything that might be brought up, but there is one important point I would like to discuss. Some people have this idea that the Bible only allows a man and his wife to have a certain type of sex – specifically, vaginal penetration. Anything beyond that (even if it is between a man and his wife) is sinful and perverted. There are also people who argue that it is wrong for a man to lust after his wife and desire her sexually, and sex should be had as infrequently as possible and should not be passionate. Both of these teachings stem from the same basic idea: that sex within marriage is only permissible if done a certain way.

As it turns out, that is *not* what the Bible has to say about sex at all. Its teachings actually go in a very different direction – but to understand why we need to take a look at a few verses.

One of the reasons people claim that certain types of sex are forbidden is because of this verse:

**Leviticus 18:22:** “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.”

It is clear from this verse that homosexuality (men having sex with other men, or women having sex with other women) is forbidden. However, some people go further than that. They claim that since homosexuals have sex with each other by means of oral sex, that means this verse is forbidding that as well. In other words, they say this verse isn't just forbidding men having sex with other men; it is also forbidding oral sex between a man and his wife, because that is something homosexuals practice. (I realize there are other things homosexuals do as well, but since this seems to be the biggest point of contention it is the point I will address.)

The first challenge is that this interpretation is taking some pretty big liberties with the verse. It does *not* say “Thou shalt not have sex with your wife in the same manner that homosexuals have sex with each other”. Some people claim that is what it says, but it actually says exactly the opposite: “A

man is forbidden from having sex with a man the way he would a woman”. Immediately we see this verse actually implies that homosexuals are doing the same sort of things that a man would do with his wife – and the verse only puts a limitation on men lying with other men. It doesn't put any limitations at all on how a man lies with his wife (nor do we find any such restriction anywhere in the Mosaic Law).

But suppose we argue that it really is a sin for a man to lie with his wife in the same way that homosexuals come together. The problem with this interpretation of verse 22 becomes immediately apparent if we apply that same logic to the next verse in Leviticus:

**Leviticus 18:23:** “Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion.”

This verse forbids men or women from having sex with animals. There are some parts of the world where this is common. In those places men have sex with animals by vaginal penetration, and women do the same thing by letting the animals take her vaginally. The reason I bring this disturbing topic up is because of the implications: if oral sex is wrong because homosexuals practice it, then vaginal sex must also be wrong because people who have sex with animals practice it. If that is the case then all sex is forbidden and nothing is left. Does that really seem likely?

The truth is people have taken these verses too far. When the Bible places limits on sex they are always limits on *who you can have sex with*, not the type of sex you are having. A man may only have sex with his wife, and his wife may only have sex with him, but *within* that union nothing is prohibited. However, all sex *outside* of that union is forbidden: sex before marriage is forbidden, sex with another man's wife is forbidden, sex with family members is forbidden, and sex with animals or people of the same sex is forbidden. It is *the partner* who makes the sin. This is made clear in the book of Romans:

**Romans 1:27:** “And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.”

What is the sin that is being described here? It is two grown men who are both filled with lust for one another, and who then have sex with one another. The problem is men burning with lust for other men. You will never find a verse in the Bible that says “A man must only have certain types of sex with his wife, and if he tries something else he is in sin”. Instead we find verses like this one:

**Hebrews 13:4:** “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

Notice that it says that marriage is honorable *in all*. It doesn't say “the marriage bed is undefiled only if you restrict yourself to passionless vaginal sex, and even then you had better have sex as infrequently as possible (and only for procreation) lest you fall into sin”. This would have been a great place to spell out the limitations that are in place when a man has sex with his wife, but instead of listing limitations God says that married sex is honorable *in all*! No limitations whatsoever are placed on it. What God condemns is not the *type* of sex that married people have, but instead when sex is had outside of marriage. Whoremongers and adulterers are two types of fornication: those who have sex outside of marriage are condemned, and those who have sex with someone else's wife are condemned. Homosexuality is condemned and having sex with animals is condemned, but there is not one verse anywhere that says “You had better be careful when having sex with your wife, because if you go too

far or cross certain lines you are in trouble”. Instead we are told that the bed is undefiled, period – but if you have sex with someone who is *not* your spouse then you are in trouble.

Nor does the Bible tell us that sex must be passionless and rare. Instead it says this:

**Proverbs 5:18-21:** “Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings.”

The Bible never condemns anyone for sexually desiring their spouse. In fact, it actually *encourages* it! Notice how the verse urges men to be “ravished” by their wives and to enjoy her sexually. This verse compares the marriage bed to two rutting animals, and it does so in a *positive way*. The implication is that it is a good thing for men to love their wives and enjoy them sexually. God never requires us to keep sex as rare and dull as possible, but instead tells us to enjoy it with great passion. What the Bible forbids is when a man strays away from his wife to have sex with someone else. That is a grave sin – but not one word is spoken about being careful regarding *how* (or *how often*) a man “ravishes” his wife.

The Song of Solomon (probably one of the most neglected books in the Bible) has a great deal to say about sex. In fact, it is pretty much *entirely* about sex. The language is poetic but it is pretty direct. It is full of verses like this one:

**Song of Solomon 2:3:** “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

This verse tells us that the woman has sat down under her lover's shadow “with great delight”, and is tasting something. I don't think it takes a lot of imagination to guess what kind of sex she is having that involves sitting in front of him while he stands before her and she tastes something. Notice that instead of being condemned, this is described as something she enjoys and delights in. It is not condemned in any way.

The sex isn't passionless, either:

**Song of Solomon 4:6:** “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.”

These people are literally having sex all night long – and that isn't seen as a bad thing! Some people claim that sex is only permissible if you are trying to have children, and anything beyond that is wrong. But you know something? The Song of Solomon has a tremendous amount to say about the joys of sex, but procreation *is not mentioned even one time*. It instead depicts sex as a beautiful gift from God that is to be richly enjoyed between a man and his wife, *completely apart* from any childbearing aspects. We are never told “the marriage bed is honorable only if you are using it for procreation, and you had better not try to use it for anything else”.

The limits that the Bible places on sex are very simple: a man and his wife may do whatever they please, but having sex with any other partners is strictly forbidden. It is the *partner* that makes the sin.