

When Your Teen Rejects Your Values – A Christian Response

Rick Rood looks at a typical teenage rebellion and offers a plan based on a biblical worldview and Christian values to help lead them through rebellion to a strong Christian walk. By reacting from a truly Christian perspective and following a biblical plan of action, our chances of successfully making it through to adulthood and greatly increased.

The Fact of Teenage Rebellion

Mark Twain once advised parents that when their child turns 13 they should put them in a barrel, close the lid, and feed them through a hole in the side. When they turn 16, Twain suggested parents close the hole! Twain was a humorist, and we laugh about his counsel. But beneath the laughter is the recognition that the teenage years are seldom easy...for the teen or their parents! And it's particularly challenging when we find that our teen is rejecting our values.

Admittedly, in tackling this issue we are taking on a real lion! If there is anything more humbling than being the parent of a rebelling teenager, it's attempting to pass on advice to others who are struggling with this same situation. But our prayer is that this pamphlet will offer some help and encouragement to parents of a challenging teen.

"Adolescence" is the label we attach to the time of life from the onset of puberty to maturity. It denotes the stage of life during which a young person moves from childhood to adulthood, from dependence upon parents to independence. It's a time of great change not only physically, but emotionally, mentally, spiritually and socially. It's a time when teens are asking questions like "Who am I?," "What do I believe?," "How do I fit into life in this world?"...when they're searching for their

identity as individuals.

Adolescence is also a time when some degree of strain develops between teens and their parents. No longer do parents appear to be infallible and beyond contradiction. Our flaws are much more visible...and probably exaggerated by our teen. It's a time when the values of their peers generally appear much more attractive than their parents', and when acceptance by their friends will likely become much more important than that of their parents.

It is not uncommon in their quest for identity and independence for teens to reject some of the values of their parents, their church, and society. And to a degree this is not unhealthy. Young people need to develop their own convictions about life. And part of the process may involve challenging the values and convictions they have been taught. Some may challenge them more overtly, and others more covertly. Some may challenge them in relatively minor areas such as dress, appearance, music, or the way they keep their room. Others may show total disregard for the moral and spiritual values of their family, their church, and even society. Parents who allow for no individuality in some of the more "minor" areas (such as dress and appearance), may be challenging their teen to test them in the areas that are of much greater consequence.

Several years back, a group that included Dr. James Dobson conducted a survey of some 35,000 parents. The survey concluded that while 25% of teens are of "average" temperament, 40% were considered to be more on the "compliant" side, and 35% on the "strong-willed" side. (More boys than girls fell in this latter category.) Among the strong-willed teens, 74% were found to be in some degree of rebellion during their teenage years, 26% of them to a severe degree. Furthermore, it was surprisingly found that the strong-willed were most susceptible to the influence of their peers! It was no surprise to find that 72% of parents of strong-willed

teens characterized their relationship as “difficult” or “very stressful”! (*Parenting Isn’t for Cowards*, by Dr. James Dobson, chaps. 3 & 4).

If you identify with this group of parents, you are definitely not alone! And perhaps this realization is an important first step in responding to a teen who rejects our values!

The Sources of Teenage Rebellion

Many a parent has wondered if the teen living in their home is really the same child that they played with and enjoyed just a few years before! And it is only natural for them to ask “Why?” “Why is this happening? And why is this happening to us?” Most parents are probably also asking themselves, “Where did we go wrong? What could we have done to prevent this from happening?” These questions are not only painful to ask, but are equally difficult to answer. And it’s important not to jump to simplistic conclusions in trying to do so.

It is very likely that there is more than one reason why our teen is rejecting our values. And there really are many possible reasons. One that we noted yesterday is that it is simply the nature of adolescents to search for their own identity and independence. We also noted the role that innate temperament plays in teenage rebellion. A survey conducted by a group including Dr. James Dobson concluded that nearly 3/4 of children born with a strong-willed temperament exhibited some degree of rebellion during their teen years. There are, however, a number of other possible reasons why our teen is rejecting our values. It’s important to look beyond their behavior to the reasons behind it.

First, it’s possible that there are physiological factors involved. Young people who have learning disabilities, or attention deficit/hyperactive disorder are going to be much more inclined to rebel, in part over the frustration they are experiencing in meeting the expectations of their parents,

teachers and other authority figures. Any physical illness, or even imbalanced or insufficient diet can affect a teen's emotional and behavioral pattern. Even apart from such irregularities, the changes that are taking place in an adolescent's hormonal system are apt to result in more volatile emotions.

Second, it is possible that there are difficulties of a psychological nature, or even disorders of a more serious nature involved. In this latter category would fall young people who are manic-depressive or schizophrenic. It is important to realize that many of these disorders have genetic and biological sources, requiring the attention of a medical professional. It is more likely, however, that a teen may be struggling with low self-esteem or depression...and may be engaging in conduct that is aimed at obtaining the acceptance of his peers, or at gaining the attention of his parents or other authority figures (even if it's negative in nature!).

Third, it is not uncommon for a young person to express his anger (and even guilt) over the tensions that may exist within the family at large or between his parents by acting in a rebellious fashion.

Traumatic experiences such as a death in the family, prolonged illness, or serious financial problems can be a source of rebellion. They may even result in a teen's questioning the existence or the goodness of God, and in rejecting of God's moral principles.

We must not fail to mention the negative influence of peers, and of the values portrayed and endorsed in today's movies, television, and by the lyrics of much of the music that young people listen to. All of these media are communicating a message that more often than not challenges the right of anyone (including parents) to limit their freedom or stifle their individuality.

Finally, it is not impossible that our own example as parents, or our parenting style has contributed to their rebellion to a greater or lesser degree. We will return to this issue later in the week, and tomorrow we will begin to look at the question of whether parents are always at fault when their teens reject their values.

A Parent's Reaction to His Teen's Rebellion

In the previous two programs we have briefly examined some basic facts about the nature of teenage rebellion and some of its possible sources. We noted that there are many possible reasons why a teen might choose to reject his parents' values. It is not uncommon, however, for those of us who are Christian parents to feel that we bear the greater (if not exclusive) share of responsibility. After all, have we not been taught that if we train our children "in the way they should go, when they are old they will not depart from it"? (Prov. 22:6). If they do depart from the way they should go, certainly it is our fault for not training them properly!

At the outset, we must affirm that parents are responsible before God to provide the training and instruction that will guide them in His way (Eph. 6:4b). The scriptures also warn us that it is possible for us to "provoke our children to anger" (Eph. 6:4a) and to "exasperate them so that they become discouraged" (Col. 3:21). When our teen is rebelling, it's appropriate for us to evaluate the impact that our own parenting style has had in our child's life.

We must just as emphatically, however, reject the notion that teenage rebellion is invariably the consequence of parental mismanagement. To believe that it is, is to accept the premise that all human behavior is caused by external influences. Behavior may be influenced (even very strongly) by genetic and environmental factors, but to say that there is no such thing

as human will and choice is to deny a fundamental element of biblical teaching. In the final analysis, a young person's rejection of godly values is a personal choice.

Many Christians, however, find themselves adopting an essentially behavioristic and deterministic philosophy in their acceptance of a common interpretation of the verse we alluded to a few moments ago, Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Many a parent has concluded from this proverb that if his teen does "depart from the way he should go," it is because he has failed to provide the training he needed. But that this proverb (as many proverbs) should be taken as general observation about life, rather than as an absolute divine promise, can be deduced from two facts. First, if we do take this proverb as an absolute promise, then other proverbs in the book must be also. Yet there are a number of proverbs for which exceptions can be found on a regular basis. For example, Proverbs 10:27 says that "The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened." This is a general truth. But there are innumerable examples of the wicked who have lived long on the earth, and of the godly whose lives have been cut short. A second reason is that to take it as an absolute promise would contradict the teaching of many other proverbs that it is possible for a young person to reject the training his parents provide. Proverbs 15:5 says, "A fool rejects his father's discipline." The writer of Proverbs also appeals to sons to "receive" and "be attentive" to their parents' instruction (2:1-2), and warns against "neglecting" and "abandoning" their teaching (4:1-2). (Cf. also Deut. 21:18-21)

We must conclude, then, that when our teen rejects our values, we must prayerfully discern to what degree both we and they are responsible for what is happening, as well as what other influences are at work. In some cases, the parents may bear a great deal of responsibility; in others they may bear very

little. The important thing, however, is not so much “who is to blame,” but what ought we to do from this point on in our relationship with our teen.

A Plan for Parents

We have looked at the nature of teenage rebellion. We’ve also addressed the question of whether it is always the parents’ fault when their teen rejects their values. But today, we want to focus on how we should respond as parents of a challenging teen.

Our first response must be to look beyond the rebellious behavior to the sources that lie behind it. If we suspect there are factors of a physiological nature, we must not neglect to enlist the help of a qualified physician. Nor should we reject the aid of a godly counselor in addressing issues of depression or self image that may lie hidden in our teen’s heart. But neither should we neglect to look to the Scriptures as our ultimate source of wisdom.

As we do, it will be tempting to look initially for ways in which we can promote change in our teenager’s behavior. But the one factor in our child’s life over which we have the most influence is our own character and approach to parenting. And this is where we must begin—by reflecting on the model which God himself provides in his character and in his relationship with us as his children. In God as our Father we find that perfect balance of judgment and grace, of discipline and love, compassion and firmness. This is a standard from which all of us fall short, the one to which we will never fully attain in this life; but the one by which we must measure our lives, and toward which we must continually strive! Larry Crabb has said, “The key to becoming a more effective parent is to become an increasingly godly person.” (*Parenting Adolescents* by Kevin Huggins, p. 258) Wise is the parent who makes this his primary goal!

Wise too is the parent who resists the impulse to project a perfect image to his teen, but who echoes the prayer of David: "Search me, O God, and know my heart...see if there be any hurtful way in me; and guide me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139:23-24). Wise is the parent who is willing to offer a sincere apology to his child, and to seek forgiveness for ways he has genuinely fallen short as a parent. But wise also is the parent who refuses to brood over past failures, but who having learned from his mistakes sets out in a new direction! (Phil. 3:13-14). And wise is the parent, as well, who guards against trying to "atone" for past mistakes by becoming overly kind or permissive.

As we seek to allow God to shape our lives after his own model as the divine parent, we will do well to keep two primary qualities in view. The first is an unconditional love for our child. This is the kind of love God manifests toward us. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were yet sinners (while we were his enemies!), Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). This is the kind of love He seeks to instill in us for our teenager, regardless of how much anger or contempt he or she has shown toward us—a love that asks not how they can meet our needs, but how God can use us to minister to their genuine needs.

But the second quality is an uncompromising commitment to help our teenager grow toward responsible maturity. "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines;...but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness" (Heb. 12:6,10). As God guides us in the path of righteousness, and establishes clear expectations for our lives, so must we for our teen. As God disciplines for rebellion through appropriate consequences, so also must we.

Above, we proposed that there are two primary qualities God seeks to instill in those of us who are parents of a teen who is rejecting our values: an unconditional love and an uncompromising commitment to guide them toward responsible

maturity. But how do these qualities take shape in our day to day lives?

How do we show this kind of love toward our teenager? First, we love them when we praise and reward them for the good that we do see in their lives, as God does with us. We love them when we show respect for their feelings and opinions, though not always agreeing with them. We love them when we show interest in and participate with them in activities that are meaningful to them, and refrain from squeezing them into a mold for they were not designed. We love them when we restrain our anger from erupting in violent acts and hurtful words, when we relate as a "fellow struggler," when we don't try to be better than they are at everything, when we handle our own sin in the same way we expect them to, when we listen to their explanations before disciplining them, when we keep alive a sense of hope and excitement about discovering God's purpose for their life!

But the love toward which we strive is also one that guides and disciplines (Prov.13:24). states that "he who loves (his son) disciplines him diligently." Researchers have found that teens are less likely to rebel who grow up in homes that are neither too permissive nor overly authoritarian, where parents gradually allow them more participation in decisions and relinquish more responsibility, while maintaining final authority (*Teen Shaping*, by Len Kageler, chaps. 3 & 12).

What are a few marks of a parent who has this kind of commitment? First, he provides instruction in the ways of the Lord. One teenager who refused to accompany his family to church, was willing to read a chapter of scripture with his father several times a week. By his senior year, they had read through the entire New Testament together! Second, he communicates clear expectations regarding personal conduct (even if parents of his child's friends do not): expectations concerning the use of language in the home, honesty about whereabouts and activities, household chores, attendance at

school, curfew, use of the car, payment for gas, insurance and traffic tickets, drinking, and sexual conduct. Finally, such a parent will enforce meaningful consequences for wilful rebellion. There are some things we are obliged to provide for our child no matter what: a place to live (though it need not be our own home in all situations), food, clothing, and personal respect. But many things that young people take for granted today are privileges that can and must be suspended as a result of irresponsible behavior: use of the phone or TV, tuition for school, use of our car, or even a driver's license. Teenagers who engage in activities that are not only irresponsible but illegal, should have every expectation that their parents will notify the authorities. We do our children no favor when we shield them from the painful consequences of foolish choices. Some teens will become skilled at manipulating their parents through guilt or intimidation. But we must resolve to render such tactics ineffective by refusing to let them work.

God does not hold us responsible for all of our teenager's actions. But He does hold us accountable for the way in which we relate to them as parents—with unconditional love, but uncompromising commitment to responsible maturity.

Yet, even when we do, God provides no guarantee that they will always (or even ever) respond positively. But He does ask that we persist in doing what is right . . . praying for them, gradually relinquishing them to Him who knows them far better than we . . . remembering his exhortation that we “not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal. 6:9).

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Addendum from the author, after his teenagers finished growing up:

It was over twelve years ago that I wrote the article you have

just read. Since then, I've had a lot of time to reflect on the matter of parenting. If there is one thing I would add to the article, it is the statement in Psalm 127:1, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."

I'm more convinced than ever that though I believe God's word does give us guidance concerning what we as parents should and should not do in relating to our children, being a parent is much more than simply "doing all the right things." It is at root a matter of trusting God to work in our children's lives in his own way and time . . . to accomplish in their lives what only He can. And of course, to trust that He will do the same in our own hearts and lives as well. Sometimes His ways are far beyond our understanding. I have met some who came from very difficult homes, who nonetheless have turned out to be wonderful people. On the other hand, I have met others who grew up in wonderful families, who nonetheless have chosen to walk a very painful path in life. All of this should cause us to make prayer our first priority as parents. There is no greater responsibility or privilege we have as parents than to pray for the children the Lord has entrusted to us. May we never cease to do so.

Resources on Parenting Teenagers

Emotionally Healthy Teenagers, by Jay Kesler (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998)

Bound by Honor, by Gary and Greg Smalley (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1998)

Parenting Today's Adolescent, by Dennis and Barbara Rainey (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998)

How to Really Love Your Teenager, by Ross Campbell (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983)

Parenting Adolescents, by Kevin Huggins (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992)

Teen-Shaping: Solving the Discipline Dilemma—What Works, What Doesn't, by Len Kageler (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1990)

Parents & Teenagers, ed. by Jay Kesler (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1984)

Parents in Pain, by John White (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1979)

Parenting Isn't for Cowards, by Dr. James Dobson (Waco: Word Books, 1987)

The Wounded Parent, by Guy Greenfield (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991)

Why Wait Till Marriage? – A Christian Perspective

Jimmy Williams and Jerry Solomon take a biblical worldview look at the question of premarital sex or fornication. They clearly show that regardless of the dominant teaching of the culture, the Bible describes the role of sex as far deeper in meaning and impact than simple physical intercourse.

Crucial moral battles are being fought in our culture. Nowhere is this seen more vividly than in the present sexual attitudes and behaviors of Americans. The average young person experiences many pressures in the formation of personal sexual standards and behavior.

The fact that some standard must be chosen cannot be ignored. Sex is here to stay, and it remains a very basic force in our lives. We cannot ignore its presence any more than we can

ignore other ordinary human drives.

This essay explores contemporary sexual perspectives within a biblical framework. Each of us needs to think through the implications of sexual alternatives and choose a personal sexual ethic based on intellectual and Christian factors, not merely biological, emotional, or social ones.

Sex and Love

Before we begin our survey of various perspectives, we need to face squarely the relationship of the physical act of sexual intercourse to the more intangible aspects of a meaningful relationship between two human beings.

Is having sex really making love? Modern case studies, psychological insights, church teachings, and biblical premises all seem to suggest not. As psychoanalyst Erich Fromm puts it, "To love a person productively implies to care and to feel responsible for his life, not only for his physical powers but for the growth and development of all his human powers."[^{\[1\]}](#)

If sex is merely a physical thing, then masturbation or other forms of autoeroticism should provide true and complete sexual satisfaction. Such is not the case. Alternatives to normal sexual intercourse may satisfy physically, but not emotionally. Meaningful sexual activity involves the physical union of a man and a woman in a relationship of mutual caring and intimacy.

Every normal person has the physical desire for sexual activity accompanied with a desire to know and be known, to love and be loved. Both desires make up the real quest for intimacy in a relationship; sexual intercourse represents only one ingredient that allows us to experience true intimacy.

A maximum sexual relationship exists where mutual communication, understanding, affection, and trust have

formed, and two people have lastingly committed themselves to each other in a permanent relationship. The more of these qualities that are present, the deeper the intimacy and the more meaningful the relationship. It becomes more valuable as time passes because it is one of a kind—unique. To spread the intimacy around through a variety of sexual liaisons destroys the accumulated value of the previous relationship(s) and dilutes and scatters (in little doses to a number of people) what one has to give.

A real challenge faces young people today. Given the choice between hamburger at five o'clock or filet mignon at seven-thirty, are there any good reasons to forego the hamburger and wait for the filet? Why not both? Why not take the hamburger now **and** the filet later?

The latter attitude is precisely the rationale of those who encourage sexual activity outside of marriage. But it is not possible to have both without encountering problems later. Too many hamburgers ruin one's taste and appreciation for filet and tend to turn filet into hamburger as well!

Contemporary Arguments for Premarital Sex

Now we will begin to consider the arguments that are presented to justify sexual activity before and outside of marriage. We will analyze the arguments briefly and explore the general implications of each rationale so that **you can decide** which will provide the best path for your future.

Biological Argument

Perhaps the most common reason used to justify premarital sexual activity is that the sex drive is a basic biological one. The argument is as old as the Bible, where Paul states in 1 Corinthians 6:13, "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food." The Corinthians were using the biological argument to justify their immorality, but Paul explained that

the analogy to the sex appetite was (and is) fallacious. Humans cannot live without food, air, or water. But we can live without sex.

Nature says several things on this point. First, God has built into the natural world a mechanism for sexual release: nocturnal emissions, or orgasmic release during dreams. Second, nature rejects human promiscuity, as the growing problem of sexually- transmitted diseases makes abundantly clear.

Couples who confine sex to their marriage partners face no such danger from disease. Further, we can safely conclude that abstinence does not impair one's health. Sociologist Robert Bell quips, "There appear to be no records of males hospitalized because girls refused to provide sexual outlets."
[{2}](#)

While recognizing that human beings share many common characteristics with animals, we do not find comparable sexual behavioral patterns in the animal world. Human sexuality is unique in that it *includes*, but *transcends*, physical reproductive elements. It reaches an intimacy unknown among animals. Humans are different from animals.

Statistical Argument

A second popular argument reasons that everyone is doing it. First, we must categorically emphasize that this is not a true statement. A recent study (1991) of college freshmen shows that "about two- thirds of men (66.3 percent) and slightly more than one-third of the women (37.9 percent) support the idea of sex between people who have known each other only for a short time."[{3}](#) As sobering as such statistics may be, they obviously indicate that not everyone is sexually active.

Further, **statistics** do not establish moral values. Is something right because it happens frequently or because many people believe it? A primitive tribe may have a 100 percent

majority consensus that cannibalism is right! Does that make it right? A majority can be wrong. If a **society** sets the standards, those standards are subject to change with the whim and will of the majority. In one generation slavery may be right and abortion wrong, as in early nineteenth-century America; but in another generation, abortion is in and slavery is out, as today.

There are enough young people in any school or community who prefer to wait until marriage that the young person who wants to wait has plenty of company. Each person must decide where he or she wants to be in a given statistical analysis of current sexual mores and behavior.

Proof of Love

A third argument suggests that sexual activity tests or provides proof of love. Supposedly, it symbolizes how much the other cares. One therefore exerts pressure on the more reluctant partner to demonstrate a certain level of care. Reluctant partners succumbing to this pressure often do so with an underlying hope that it will somehow cement the relationship and discourage the other partner from searching elsewhere for a less hesitant friend.

Any person who insists on making sex the ultimate proof of a genuine relationship isn't saying "I love you," but rather "I love it." True love concerns itself with the well-being of the other person and would not interpret sexual hesitation in such a selfish way. Furthermore, the person adopting this practice develops a pattern of demonstrating love by purely sexual responsiveness. Ultimately he or she enters marriage with something of a distortion as to what real intimacy means, to say nothing of having to deal with the memories of previous loves. Some behaviors are irreversible, and this process is like trying to unscramble an egg. Once it's done, it's done.

The broader perspective sees sex as an integral and important

part of a meaningful relationship but not the totality of it. Remembering this will help any individual to make the right decision to refrain from sexual involvement if a potential partner puts on the pressure to make sex the test of a meaningful relationship.

Psychological Argument

The psychological argument is also a popular one and is closely tied to the biological argument previously discussed. Here's the question: Is sexual restraint bad for you?

Sublimating one's sex drive is not unhealthy. In sublimation the processes of sexual and aggressive energy are displaced by nonsexual and nondestructive goals.

But guilt, unlike sublimation, can produce devastating results in human behavior. It is anger turned inward, producing depression, a lowered self-esteem, and fatigue. Further, chastity and virginity contribute very little to sexual problems. Unsatisfying relationships, guilt, hostility toward the opposite sex, and low self-esteem do. In short, there are no scars where there have been no wounds.

In this hedonistic society, some persons need no further justification for sexual activity beyond the fact that it's fun. "If it feels good, do it!" says the bumper sticker. But the fun syndrome forces us to sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate.

The sex act itself is no guarantee of fun. Initial sex experiences outside of marriage are often disappointing because of high anxiety and guilt levels. Fear of discovery, haste, and lack of commitment and communication all combine to spoil some of the fun. Further, there is no way to avoid the exploitation of someone in the relationship if it's just for fun. Sometimes one person's pleasure is another's pain. No one likes to be or feel used.

Marilyn Monroe was a sex symbol for millions. She said, "People took a lot for granted; not only could they be friendly, but they could suddenly get overly friendly and expect an awful lot for a very little."[{4}](#) She felt used. She died naked and alone, with an empty bottle of sleeping pills beside a silent telephone. Was the fame and fun worth it? Evidently she thought not.

Experiential Argument

This perspective emphasizes a desire on the part of an individual not to appear like a sexual novice on the wedding night. One answer to this is to have enough sexual experience prior to marriage so that one brings practice, not theory to the initial sexual encounter in marriage. But the body was designed to perform sexually and will do so given the opportunity.

This is not to say that sexual skill cannot be gained through experience. It is to say that every skill acquired by humans must have a beginning point. If the idea of two virgins on their wedding night brings amusement to our minds instead of admiration, it is actually a sad commentary on how far we have slipped as individuals and as a culture.

It must be emphasized again that healthy sexual adjustment depends much more on communication than technique. World-famous sex therapists Masters and Johnson found

Nothing good is going to happen in bed between a husband and wife unless good things have been happening between them before they go into bed. There is no way for a good sexual technique to remedy a poor emotional relationship.[{5}](#)

In other words, a deeply-committed couple with **no** sexual experience is far ahead of a sexually-experienced couple with shallow and tentative commitment, as far as the marriage's future sexual success is concerned.

Compatibility Argument

A corollary to the experiential argument is the one of compatibility. The idea is, How will I know if the shoe fits unless first I try it on? A foot stays about the same size, but the human sex organs are wonderfully stretchable and adaptable. A woman's vagina can enlarge to accommodate the birth of a baby or to fit a male organ of any size. Physical compatibility is 99 percent guaranteed, and the other 1 percent can become so with medical consultation and assistance.

Of greater importance is to test person-to-person compatibility. Sexual dysfunction in young people is usually psychologically based. Building bridges of love and mutual care in the non-physical facets of the relationship are the sure roads to a honeymoon that can last a lifetime.

Contraceptive Argument

The contraceptive argument supposedly takes the fear of pregnancy out of sexual activity and gives moderns a virtual green light. Actually, the light is at most pale green and perhaps only yellow. The simple fact is that pregnancy (along with sexually-transmitted diseases) remains a possibility.

Beyond the question of contraceptive use is the entire area of unwanted children. There are no good alternatives for children born out of wedlock. Do we have the right to deprive children of life or a secure family setting and loving parents to supply their basic needs? Ironically, even severely battered children choose to be with their parents over other alternatives. Parental love and security are highly prized.

Sexual intimacy between a man and a woman is not exclusively their private affair. Sexual intercourse must take place with a view toward facing the consequences. The time of moral decision in sexual matters comes before one decides to have sex with someone, not later when unforeseen circumstances take

things the wrong way.

Marital Argument

Perhaps the most prominent argument for premarital sex among Christians is the marital argument, which says, “We are in love and plan to marry soon. Why should we wait?”

Dr. Howard Hendricks, an authority on the family, comments that the best way to mortgage your marriage is to play around at the door of marriage.^{6} Loss of respect and intensity of feelings may occur, as well as guilt and dissatisfaction. Restraint for a time adds excitement to the relationship and makes the honeymoon something very special, not a continuation of already-established patterns. Some couples also see little value in a public declaration of marital intent. Or they may think the formality of a wedding is the equivalent of dogma. Those who prefer no public declaration but rather seek anonymity may be saying something about the depth (or lack thereof) of their commitment to one another. Do they have their fingers crossed?

Contemporary studies indicate that the marital argument is not sound. Of 100 couples who cohabit, 40 break up before they marry. Of the 60 who marry, 45 divorce—leaving only 15 of 100 with a lasting marriage. Thus, cohabitation has two negative effects: it sharply reduces the number who marry, and dramatically increases the divorce rate of those who do.^{7}

Engaged couples, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:36-37, should either control their sexual drives or marry. Intercourse, then, is not proper for engaged couples. They should either keep their emotions in check or marry.

Conclusion

We have examined some of the major arguments used to justify premarital sex. If these are the strongest defenses of sex outside of marriage, the case is weak. Our brief trek through

the wilderness of contemporary sexual ideas has led to some virtual dead ends.

There are good reasons to make a commitment to limit our sexual experience to a time when the sex act can be reinforced in a context of permanent love and care. From this perspective, virginity is not viewed as something that must be eliminated as soon as possible, but as a gift to treasure and save for a special and unique person.

The biblical standard that puts sex within the fidelity and security of marriage is the most responsible code that has ever been developed. You are justified in following it without apology as the best standard for protecting human, moral, and Christian values that has been devised.

Some reading this may have already had sexual experience outside of marriage. The data we have discussed is not intended to condemn or produce guilt.

The good news is that Jesus Christ came for the expressed purpose of forgiving our sins, sexual and all other. Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, will forgive us. The real question now is, What shall we do with the future? Christ can cleanse the past, but He expects us to respond to the light He gives us. Hopefully this discussion will help you strengthen your convictions with regard to sexual decisions and behavior in the days ahead. As the adage says, today is the first day of the rest of your life.

Notes

1. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).
2. Robert R. Bell, *Premarital Sex in a Changing Society*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966) p. 150.
3. [Editor's note] We believe this data is from the American Freshman annual study, but unfortunately neither of the authors is able to verify the source.

4. Evelyn M. Duvall, *Why Wait Till Marriage?* (New York: Association Press, 1965, p. 38.
5. William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *The Pleasure Bond* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), pp. 113-14).
6. Howard Hendricks, lecture at Dallas Theological Seminary. "Christian Home Course," 1978.
7. See Kerby Anderson's article "Cohabitation" at Probe.org/cohabitation.

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