

Sex and Violence on Television – A Christian Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson takes a reasoned look at the amount of sex and violence portrayed on television and comes away with a sobering understanding of the intensity of the problem. From a biblical perspective, this level of consumption of disturbing images will result in a deadening of even Christian hearts to the clear call of Scripture to a life of purity in mind and action.

The Extent of the Problem

Is there too much sex and violence on television? Most Americans seem to think so. One survey found that seventy-five percent of Americans felt that television had “too much sexually explicit material.” Moreover, eighty-six percent believed that television had contributed to “a decline in values.”[\[1\]](#) And no wonder. Channel surfing through the television reveals plots celebrating premarital sex, adultery, and even homosexuality. Sexual promiscuity in the media appears to be at an all-time high. A study of adolescents (ages twelve to seventeen) showed that watching sex on TV influences teens to have sex. Youths were more likely to initiate intercourse as well as other sexual activities.[\[2\]](#)

A study by the Parents Television Council found that prime time network television is more violent than ever before. In addition, they found that this increasing violence is also of a sexual nature. They found that portrayals of violence are up seventy-five percent since 1998.[\[3\]](#)

The study also provided expert commentary by Deborah Fisher, Ph.D. She states that children, on average, will be exposed to

a thousand murders, rapes, and assaults per year through television. She goes on to warn that early exposure to television violence has “consistently emerged as a significant predictor of later aggression.”[\[4\]](#)

A previous study by the Parents Television Council compared the changes in sex, language, and violence between decades. The special report entitled *What a Difference a Decade Makes* found many shocking things.[\[5\]](#)

First, on a per-hour basis, sexual material more than tripled in the last decade. For example, while references to homosexuality were once rare, now they are mainstream. Second, the study found that foul language increased five-fold in just a decade. They also found that the intensity of violent incidents significantly increased.

These studies provide the best quantifiable measure of what has been taking place on television. No longer can defenders of television say that TV is “not that bad.” The evidence is in, and television is more offensive than ever.

Christians should not be surprised by these findings. Sex and violence have always been part of the human condition because of our sin nature (Romans 3:23), but modern families are exposed to a level of sex and violence that is unprecedented. Obviously, this will have a detrimental effect. The Bible teaches that “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7, KJV). What we see and hear affects our actions. And while this is true for adults, it is especially true for children.

Television’s Impact on Behavior

What is the impact of watching television on subsequent behavior? There are abundant studies which document that what you see, hear, and read does affect your perception of the world and your behavior.

The American Academy of Pediatrics in 2000 issued a "Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children." They cited over one thousand studies, including reports from the Surgeon General's office and the National Institute of Mental Health. They say that these studies "point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children."[\[6\]](#)

In 1992, the American Psychological Association concluded that forty years of research on the link between TV violence and real-life violence has been ignored, stating that "the 'scientific debate is over' and calling for federal policy to protect society."[\[7\]](#)

A 1995 poll of children ten to sixteen years of age showed that children recognize that "what they see on television encourages them to take part in sexual activity too soon, to show disrespect for their parents, [and] to lie and to engage in aggressive behavior." More than two-thirds said they are influenced by television; seventy-seven percent said TV shows too much sex before marriage, and sixty-two percent said sex on television and in movies influences their peers to have sexual relations when they are too young. Two-thirds also cited certain programs featuring dysfunctional families as encouraging disrespect toward parents.

The report reminds us that television sets the baseline standard for the entire entertainment industry. Most homes (ninety-eight percent) have a television set. And according to recent statistics, that TV in the average household is on more than eight hours each day.[\[8\]](#)

By contrast, other forms of entertainment (such as movies, DVDs, CDs) must be sought out and purchased. Television is universally available, and thus has the most profound effect on our culture.

As Christians we need to be aware of the impact television has

on us and our families. The studies show us that sex and violence on TV can affect us in subtle yet profound ways. We can no longer ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perceptions and behaviors. So we should be concerned about the impact television (as well as other forms of media) has on our neighbors and our society as a whole.

Sex on Television

Most Americans believe there is too much sex on television. A survey conducted in 1994 found that seventy-five percent of Americans felt that television had “too much sexually explicit material.” Moreover, eighty-six percent believed that television had contributed to “a decline in values.”^{9} As we documented earlier, sexual promiscuity on television is at an all-time high.

I have previously written about the subject of pornography and talked about the dangerous effects of sex, especially when linked with violence.^{10} Neil Malamuth and Edward Donnerstein document the volatile impact of sex and violence in the media. They say, “There can be relatively long-term, anti-social effects of movies that portray sexual violence as having positive consequences.”^{11}

In a message given by Donnerstein, he concluded with this warning and observation: “If you take normal males and expose them to graphic violence against women in R-rated films, the research doesn’t show that they’ll commit acts of violence against women. It doesn’t say they will go out and commit rape. But it does demonstrate that they become less sensitized to violence against women, they have less sympathy for rape victims, and their perceptions and attitudes and values about violence change.”^{12}

It is important to remember that these studies are applicable

not just to hard-core pornography. Many of the studies used films that are readily shown on television (especially cable television) any night of the week. And many of the movies shown today in theaters are much more explicit than those shown just a few years ago.

Social commentator Irving Kristol asked this question in a *Wall Street Journal* column: "Can anyone really believe that soft porn in our Hollywood movies, hard porn in our cable movies and violent porn in our 'rap' music is without effect? Here the average, overall impact is quite discernible to the naked eye. And at the margin, the effects, in terms most notably of illegitimacy and rape, are shockingly visible."[\[13\]](#)

Christians must be careful that sexual images on television don't conform us to the world (Rom. 12:2). Instead we should use discernment. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

Sex on television is at an all-time high, so we should be even more careful to screen what we and our families see. Christians should be concerned about the images we see on television.

Violence on Television

Children's greatest exposure to violence comes from television. TV shows, movies edited for television, and video games expose young children to a level of violence unimaginable just a few years ago. The American Psychological Association says the average child watches eight thousand televised murders and one hundred thousand acts of violence before finishing elementary school.[\[14\]](#) That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age eighteen.

At a very young age, children are seeing a level of violence and mayhem that in the past may have been seen only by a few police officers and military personnel. TV brings hitting, kicking, stabbings, shootings, and dismemberment right into homes on a daily basis.

The impact on behavior is predictable. Two prominent Surgeon General reports in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a ninety-four page report, *Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties*. They found “overwhelming” scientific evidence that “excessive” violence on television spills over into the playground and the streets.[{15}](#) In one five-year study of 732 children, “several kinds of aggression, conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency, were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing.”[{16}](#)

Long-term studies are even more disturbing. University of Illinois psychologist Leonard Eron studied children at age eight and then again at eighteen. He found that television habits established at the age of eight influenced aggressive behavior throughout childhood and adolescent years. The more violent the programs preferred by boys in the third grade, the more aggressive their behavior, both at that time and ten years later. He therefore concluded that “the effect of television violence on aggression is cumulative.”[{17}](#)

Twenty years later Eron and Rowell Huesmann found the pattern continued. He and his researchers found that children who watched significant amounts of TV violence at the age of eight were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at thirty.[{18}](#) They concluded that “heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of

intelligence.”[\[19\]](#)

Violent images on television affect children in adverse ways and Christians should be concerned about the impact.

Biblical Perspective

Television is such a part of our lives that we often are unaware of its subtle and insidious influence. Nearly every home has a television set, so we tend to take it for granted and are often oblivious to its influence.

I’ve had many people tell me that they watch television, and that it has no impact at all on their worldview or behavior. However the Bible teaches that “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). What we view and what we think about affects our actions. And there is abundant psychological evidence that television viewing affects our worldview.

George Gerbner and Larry Gross, working at the Annenberg School of Communications in the 1970s, found that heavy television viewers live in a scary world. “We have found that people who watch a lot of TV see the real world as more dangerous and frightening than those who watch very little. Heavy viewers are less trustful of their fellow citizens, and more fearful of the real world.”[\[20\]](#) Heavy viewers also tended to overestimate their likelihood of being involved in a violent crime. They defined heavy viewers as those adults who watch an average of four or more hours of television a day. Approximately one-third of all American adults fit that category.

And if this is true of adults, imagine how television violence affects children’s perceptions of the world. Gerbner and Gross say, “Imagine spending six hours a day at the local movie house when you were twelve years old. No parent would have permitted it. Yet, in our sample of children, nearly half of the twelve-year-olds watch an average of six or more hours of

television per day.” This would mean that a large portion of young people fit into the category of heavy viewers. Their view of the world must be profoundly shaped by TV. Gerbner and Gross therefore conclude, “If adults can be so accepting of the reality of television, imagine its effect on children. By the time the average American child reaches public school, he has already spent several years in an electronic nursery school.”[\[21\]](#)

Television viewing affects both adults and children in subtle ways. We must not ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perceptions and behaviors. Our worldview and our subsequent actions are affected by what we see on television. Christians, therefore, must be careful not to let television conform us to the world (Romans 12:2), but instead should develop a Christian worldview.

Notes

1. National Family Values: A Survey of Adults conducted by Voter/Consumer Research (Bethesda, MD, 1994).
 2. Rebecca Collins, et. al., “Watching Sex on Television Predicts Adolescent Initiation of Sexual Behavior,” *Pediatrics*, Vol. 114 (3), September 2004.
 3. Kristen Fyfe, “More Violence, More Sex, More Troubled Kids,” *Culture and Media Institute*, 11 January 2007, www.cultureandmediainstitute.org.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Parents Television Council, Special Report: What a Difference a Decade Makes, 30 March 2000, www.parentstv.org.
 6. Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children, *American Academy of Pediatrics*, 26 July 2000.
 7. David Grossman, “What the Surgeon General Found; As Early as 1972, the Link Was Clear Between Violent TV and Movies and Violent Youths,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 October 1999, B-11.
- “Average home has more TVs than people,” *USA Today*, 21 September 2006,

www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2006-09-21-homes-tv_x.htm

9. National Family Values: A Survey of Adults conducted by Voter/Consumer Research (Bethesda, MD, 1994).
10. Kerby Anderson, "[The Pornography Plague](#)," Probe Ministries, 1997, <http://www.probe.org/content/view/821/169/> .
11. Neil Malamuth and Edward Donnerstein, *Pornography and Sexual Aggression* (New York: Academic, 1984).
12. Edward Donnerstein, "What the Experts Say," a forum at the Industry-wide Leadership Conference on Violence in Television Programming, 2 August 1993, in *National Council for Families and Television Report*, 9.
13. Irving Kristol, "Sex, Violence and Videotape," *Wall Street Journal*, 31 May 1994.
14. John Johnston, "Kids: Growing Up Scared," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1994, p. E01.
15. Cited in "Warning from Washington," *Time*, 17 May 1982, 77.
16. James Mann, "What Is TV Doing to America?" *U.S. News and World Report*, 2 August 1982, 27.
17. Leo Bogart, "Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined that TV Violence Is Moderately Dangerous to Your Child's Mental Health," *Public Opinion* (Winter, 1972-73): 504.
18. Peter Plagen, "Violence in Our Culture," *Newsweek*, 1 April 1991, 51.
19. Ibid.
20. George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "The Scary World of TV's Heavy Viewer," *Psychology Today*, April 1976.
21. Ibid.

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“When Is It Wrong to Have Lust For Your Spouse?”

I read this in your [article](#) about God’s plan for sex in marriage and I need some clarification.

Here’s their list of what God prohibits in His Word:

Fornication (immoral sex, which is any sex outside of marriage)

Adultery

Homosexuality

Impurity

Orgies

Prostitution

Lustful passions

Sodomy

Bestiality

Incest

Obscenity and coarse jokes

Can you please give a more specific definition of impurity, and lustful passions? What is the difference between being attracted to your spouse, and lusting after your spouse? When does it become evil? I am really concerned about this because I don’t know if the passion my husband has for me is too much, to the point of being evil lust...

Within marriage, there isn’t a problem with lust toward our spouses, since lust is a strong desire for something God hasn’t given us, and He HAS given us our spouse! In fact, I heard Linda Dillow (co-author of *Intimate Issues*) once suggest to wives that we pray for a “holy lust” for our husbands, which is a way of praying for greater sexual desire (a win-win for everybody).

Impurity is having thoughts and engaging in actions that are

directed toward the wrong person (i.e., someone other than one's spouse), such as thinking about being sexual with another person, or dressing in a way to be alluring to anyone other than one's husband.

The passion your husband has for you is God-designed and God-given. Men are visual creatures, and when you combine that with the testosterone that God created to flow through his body, it means he has a strong desire for sex—WITH YOU. When he directs that desire toward you and you alone, this is the safety net that marriage provides. God means for our sexuality to flow within the banks of marriage alone, and not overflow those banks into other relationships or a habit of physical masturbation (a temptation for men and a growing number of women) or emotional fantasy (a temptation for mainly women).

Speaking as one woman to another, we will probably never understand how strong a man's sex drive is, or the power of his attraction for us and our bodies, but that's the way God designed it, so you don't need to worry about it being lustful in a sinful way. Being desired is one of the great joys of life (think about the opposite: not being wanted!!), and may I suggest that you enjoy it as the gift that God intends for it to be.

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
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The Proper Care and Feeding

of Husbands: A Christian View

Sue Bohlin looks at this important book from a distinctly Christian perspective. Filtering the advice through a biblical worldview increases the purity and strength of the message on how to minister effectively to your husband.

Why We Need This Book

Talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger has written a book that is improving thousands of marriages: *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*.^{1} We need this book because millions of wives either don't know how to love their husbands wisely and well, or they're too self-centered to see it as important. Dr. Laura credits this dismal condition to forty years of feminist philosophy, "with its condemnation of just about everything male as evil, stupid, and oppressive, and the denigration of female and male roles in families."^{2} While the women's movement certainly had a hand to play in the disintegration of relationships and the family, I believe the core cause is our sinful self-centeredness, just as the Bible says.^{3}

Which is why we need help, and God instructs older women to train younger women to love their husband and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.^{4} *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* is a great resource for learning these important values and skills.

God gives us great power as women. Dr. Laura says, "Men are borne of women and spend the rest of their lives yearning for a woman's acceptance and approval. . . . Men admittedly are putty in the hands of a woman they love. Give him direct communication, respect, appreciation, food and good lovin', and he'll do just about anything you wish—foolish or not."^{5}

We'll be looking at these aspects of the proper care and feeding of husbands in this article, starting with a man's need for *direct communication*.

- We can improve on communication by doing it less. God made us verbal creatures, which can frustrate men with the overwhelming amount of our words. Instead of expecting her husband to be a girlfriend (and men make wonderful husbands, but not girlfriends), the wise wife selects for true connecting value, gives the bottom line first, and chooses her timing well.
- Men make terrible mind readers, so be direct. Dropping subtle hints doesn't work with most men, and it doesn't mean a man is insensitive, uncaring, or oblivious.
- Spell out whether you want help and advice, or if you're just venting. God made men to want to be our heroes, so understand you can frustrate him if he can't fix what's hurting you because all you want is someone to listen.
- And finally, take whatever he says at face value. Women tend to overanalyze men when they are just not that complicated.

Respect

A listener to Dr. Laura's radio show named Edgar wrote, "There are a few things that men want so bad they would do anything for it. I think a good number of men want respect more than love. They like to feel they have some power. I nearly cry when you tell a woman caller to respect her husband. There is so much selfishness in the world—in marriages. Prosperity has allowed women to be so independent, and thus so selfish. I always feel as though I come last—my feelings come last, my needs come last." [\[6\]](#)

"A good number of men want respect more than love." God knew this when He made us. His commands to husbands and wives in

Ephesians 5:33 reflects each one's deepest needs: "Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Dr. Emerson Eggerichs of LoveandRespect.com points out that this verse commands a husband to love his wife. Why? She needs love like she needs air to breathe. This same verse commands a wife to respect her husband. Why? He needs respect like he needs air to breathe. [{7}](#)

- Respect means treating someone in a way that builds him up and doesn't tear him down, never denigrating or attacking. [{8}](#)
- Respect means always treating the other person with the dignity they deserve as a person made in the image of God.
- Respect means grasping that a man's needs and wants are every bit as valid and important as a woman's needs and wants.
- Respect means not venting to others, *especially* the children. One woman wrote to Dr. Laura, "No emotional outlet is worth damaging my husband's reputation." [{9}](#)

There are three A's that men long for from their wives: attention, affection, and affirmation. Respect involves paying attention to what they do simply because they're the ones doing it.

Respect means allowing the other person to be different and do things differently than you. One repentant wife told Dr. Laura, "And in the end, it doesn't much matter that they eat PBJ sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner for a day or that one tooth brushing gets overlooked or whatever little thing that used to set me off!" [{10}](#)

One way to give respect is to give grace instead of resenting the things he does that complicate your life (like leaving drinking glasses in the living room or clothing on a chair). Ask yourself, "Is he *intentionally* doing this to bug me? To make my life difficult? If he were to die tomorrow, what

wouldn't I give to have him back leaving these things out?"

Appreciation

Ask any woman what she wants, and near the top of her list she'll tell you, "I want to be acknowledged and appreciated for the things I do." Well, men want the same thing!

A man named Evan wrote to Dr. Laura: "My wife feels that if she doesn't remind me again and again, something won't get done. But the fact is, it makes me feel like her child and that Mommy needs to check up on me. It's degrading. I want to be admired. I want to be acknowledged for being the breadwinner and making sure that we are all well taken care of. My greatest pleasure is when I feel like her hero. Like her 'man.' Not her boy."[\[11\]](#)

It doesn't matter what a husband's primary love language is, every man wants to be shown appreciation for who he is and what he does.

I love to suggest to young wives and mothers, "Keep a gratitude journal to help you be on the lookout for the things your husband does that you appreciate. Every night, write down three things you noticed. And then *tell him* the kinds of things that are in your book!"

- Thank him for going to work every morning even when he doesn't feel like it.
- Thank him for being faithful to you.
- Thank him for loving you.
- Thank him for giving you children—or even desiring to.
- Thank him for taking out the garbage, and changing the oil in your car, and mowing the yard.

- Thank him for bringing home his paycheck and not spending it on gambling or booze or drugs or women.

And then there's the opposite of appreciation. The universal complaint of men who e-mailed Dr. Laura about her book "was that their wives criticize, complain, nag, rarely compliment or express appreciation, are difficult to satisfy, and basically are not as nice to them as they'd be to a stranger ringing their doorbell at three A.M.!"[{12}](#) So allow me to make some suggestions:

- Request, don't demand. Demanding is rude and disrespectful.
- Don't nag. If you have to ask more than once, ask as if it were the first time you were making the request.
- Keep your mouth shut about things that don't matter. Ask yourself, is this the hill you want to die on?
- Don't be controlling—which is micromanaging. Dr. Laura wrote, "When women micromanage, their husbands give up trying to please them, and then the wives complain that their men don't do anything for them."[{13}](#)

Proverbs says, "Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body."[{14}](#) (This is truer no place more than in marriage.) Let your words be kind and full of appreciation.

Support

A man named Roy wrote to Dr. Laura with some good advice for wives: "If you can't accentuate the positive, at least acknowledge it. The world is full of messages to men that there are standards we don't meet. There is always another man who is more handsome, more virile, or more athletic than we are. None of that matters if the most important person in our

life looks up to us, accepts us as we are, and loves us even though we aren't perfect. . . . All I know is that the husband who has a wife who supports him and praises him for the positive things he does is the envy of all the other men who have to live with criticism, sarcasm, and constant reminders of their failures." [{15}](#)

Men desperately want and need the support of their wives. This is reflected in what God reveals in His Word when He says, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." [{16}](#) And through the apostle Paul, God instructs wives to relate to their husbands in a way that meets this need when He says, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord." [{17}](#)

Submission is basically giving support with a willing, cooperative heart.

A wife's submission includes knowing her gifts and strengths, and using them to serve her husband and family.

Service has a bad name, but both husbands and wives are called to serve God first and then each other; husbands are called to sacrificially love and serve their wives with Jesus as their pattern. [{18}](#)

So what does support look like?

- Believing in him. Telling him, "You have what it takes." Being his #1 fan.
- Cultivating a cooperative heart.
- Being generous and openhearted—willing to use your gifts and strengths to help him succeed.
- Understanding the importance of making him look good: never saying anything negative in public.
- Creating a home that's a safe haven from the world.

- Having a warm heart with a positive, cheerful demeanor. Women set the temperature of the home; we are thermostats, not thermometers, of the family. (On the other hand, Proverbs says “A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand.”[{19}](#))
- Being interested in him and his life.
- Showing thoughtfulness. What does he like? Do it.
- And though by no means exhaustive, it also means being a person of faithfulness and integrity. That means keeping your promises and being dependable. As Proverbs 31 puts it, “Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.”[{20}](#)

Good Lovin’

Dr. Laura writes that men need to feel the approval, acceptance and attachment from their women that comes from physical intimacy.[{21}](#) For women, emotional intimacy leads to physical intimacy. For men, it’s the other way around; physical intimacy is the key to opening their hearts.

A man named Chris writes: “I don’t understand why women don’t understand that sex is a man’s number one need for his wife. It’s not just the act and sensation of pleasure, but it’s the acceptance by a woman of her man. There’s a communion that happens during intercourse that will bond a man to his woman, and he in turn will then begin to give of himself emotionally to her.”[{22}](#)

Wives can discover that giving themselves sexually to their husbands with a warm, open-hearted, loving spirit, can be the most effective encouragement to getting their husbands to open up emotionally.

“What attracts men to women is their femininity, and femininity isn’t only about appearance, it’s also about behaviors. Looking womanly and behaving sweetly and flirtatiously are gifts wives give to their husbands.” We see this modeled in the Song of Solomon, where the King’s bride displays her feminine charms in a holy seduction of her husband, and the way she tells him what she loves about his body.[{23}](#)

Instead, our culture has things backward; many unmarried girls and women flaunt their bodies with a total lack of modesty or propriety. Once they marry, it’s flannel nightgowns, wool socks, and no makeup.

Dr. Laura calls wives to give themselves sexually to their husbands, even when they don’t feel like it, as an act of love. It’s really no different, she points out, than the fact that they expect their husbands to go to work and earn money to support the family even on days they don’t feel like it.

She’s echoing what God said in 1 Corinthians 7 about husband and wife both fulfilling their marital duty to each other because each one’s body belongs not just to themselves but to each other. He also said not to deprive each other for extended periods of time lest we be tempted.

Consider the wisdom of radio listener Herb: “Sex is to a husband what conversation is to a wife. When a wife deprives her husband of sex for days, even weeks on end, it is tantamount to his refusing to talk to her for days, even weeks. Think of it that way, wives, and realize what a deleterious impact enforced sexual abstinence has on a good man who is determined to remain faithful.”[{24}](#)

I can’t recommend *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* highly enough. In fact, I gave a copy to my new daughter-in-law! Let me close with one more piece of wisdom from Dr. Laura: “[M]en are simple creatures who come from a woman, are

nurtured and brought up by a woman, and yearn for the continued love, admiration and approval of a woman. . . Women need to better appreciate the magnitude of their power and influence over men, and not misuse or abuse it.”{25} Amen!

Notes

1. Laura Schlessinger, *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*, New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

2. Schlessinger, 3.

3. Jeremiah 17:9

4. Titus 2:4

5. Schlessinger, xvii.

6. Schlessinger, 1.

7.

<http://www.loveandrespect.com/Articles/article.asp?aid=43&cat=1>

8. Schlessinger, 157.

9. Schlessinger, 159.

10. Schlessinger, 158.

11. Schlessinger, 31.

12. Schlessinger, 37-38.

13. Schlessinger, 57.

14. Prov. 16:24

15. Schlessinger, 47-48.

16. Gen. 2:18.

17. Eph. 5:22, 24.

18. Eph. 2:25, 28.

19. Prov. 27:15.

20. Prov. 31:11.

21. Schlessinger, 25.

22. Schlessings, 129.

23. Song of Solomon 5:10-16

24. Schlessinger, 119.

25. Schlessinger. 10.

“How Far Is Too Far?”

My question is one that has been posed to me on many occasions by many a frustrated teenager. They hear all the information about sex and everything that goes with it, but the one question which I still find being asked all the time is... “How far is too far?” as well as ways to prevent themselves from reaching these boundaries. Would it be possible for an article to be written from a biblical perspective on how far is too far and ways to prevent adolescents from crossing these boundaries?

Since I have worked with high school students and addressed this issue a lot, let me share what wisdom I have gleaned from others and learned from the Word.

Another way to phrase your question is, “Where should I draw the line?”

The line is the place where our behavior moves from that which glorifies God, to that which is sin or leads to sin (either mental or physical sin).

Scripture says, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Cor. 7:1). One of the meanings for the Greek word for “touch” means “to press against in such a way as to kindle or catch on fire.” So another way to translate this verse would be, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman so that they become sexually aroused.”

This is true wisdom, because once people become sexually aroused, hormones kick in and it gets hard to think rationally. So it is far easier to stay in control by limiting our behavior to that which isn't sexual.

I suggest that this means not touching anyone in a way you wouldn't dream of touching one's pastor (or pastor's wife, depending on your gender), or family member. When it comes to dating couples, that means not kissing each other with anything more than you'd give your sister or brother.

So the bottom line is, I suggest that "the line" should be drawn between a short kiss and a long kiss. Short kisses are not necessarily sexual, but long kisses are. Sexual arousal happens after you cross the line from a short kiss to a long kiss. Sexual activity outside of marriage is the sin the Bible calls fornication; it's a sin because God wants all sex (and sexual activity, even if it's far short of intercourse) to be contained within marriage since it's so powerful. Many kids define sex as intercourse, but God's view of sex is far broader than that. Even physiologically, we can tell that sexual feelings occur as a result of doing things that are a long way from intercourse.

Things become startlingly clear when you think: "What if I touch or kiss my brother or sister in this way?" If the thought of French kissing your sibling grosses you out (and I hope it would), then that means it's sexual, and it falls in the category of "off limits."

This discussion is a different approach from "How far is too far," because that question really means "How close to the edge of the cliff can I walk without falling off?" God wants us to ask, "What do I need to do to stay holy and glorify God in everything I do?"

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What’s God’s Plan for Sex in Marriage?”

I’m wondering if the bible addresses the issue of sexuality after marriage. Is sex only for pleasure acceptable once a couple is married? If so are there certain ways married couples can have sex? I.e., different positions that are appropriate and others that are not?

I look forward to the day when I have a wife and can enjoy these gifts, but I want to make sure that I’m doing it in a God honoring way.

It sure does! A whole book about sexuality after marriage! The Song of Solomon is extremely erotic, but it’s written in symbolism so a lot of people miss it if they’re looking for only the literal. For instance, the use of “fruit” usually refers to the husband’s genitals, and “garden” to the wife’s. God’s word on sex after marriage is “Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers.” (SoS 5:1)

Jody and Linda Dillow have written two excellent books on God’s view of sex; Jody wrote *Solomon on Sex* (which is out of print, but you can find it used online), and Linda co-wrote (along with Lorraine Pintus) the book *Intimate Issues*. They offer three guidelines for discerning what God permits in sexual expression:

1. Is it prohibited in God’s word?
2. Is it beneficial? (In other words, does it harm people or hinder the sexual relationship?)
3. Does it involve anyone else?

Here’s their list of what God prohibits in His Word:

Fornication (immoral sex, which is any sex outside of marriage)
Adultery
Homosexuality
Impurity
Orgies
Prostitution
Lustful passions
Sodomy
Bestiality
Incest
Obscenity and coarse jokes

There is more freedom than there are restrictions for married couples. If God doesn't prohibit something, and it doesn't involve anyone else (whether through video, the internet, print media or in the flesh), and it's acceptable to both people, then God gives a green light and says, "Enjoy!"

The Dillows also provide six reasons God gave the gift of sex:

1. To create life
2. For intimate oneness
3. Knowledge
4. Pleasure
5. Defense against temptation
6. Comfort

As you can see, only one is procreation!

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

“Is Oral Sex a Sin?”

Is oral sex a sin? Does it constitute having sex? Can you have and give oral sex and still remain a virgin? Is it okay to have oral sex if you're in a committed marriage? And if it's wrong can you tell me where in the Bible it says this?

I'm sorry about the many questions but these questions have been nagging me for quite a while.

Is oral sex a sin?

It's permitted within marriage (by mutual consent), but a sin outside of marriage. In condemning fornication (some translations call it “sexual immorality”), the Bible says that all sexual activity outside of marriage is sin. It's not that God is a cosmic killjoy—it's that He knows the best way to protect us is to keep the extraordinarily powerful nature of sex contained within the safe confines of a committed marriage relationship.

Does it constitute having sex?

Yes. We need to define “sex” more broadly than many people do (such as a former president . . .). There are a great many sexual activities and behaviors that fall in the category of “sex” besides intercourse. Here's a helpful question to help think clearly about any particular activity, such as open-mouth kissing or oral sex: would you do it with your parent or your pastor? If you shrink back in disgust at the thought, that means it's sexual. (But holding hands, however, is something you can do with anyone without it being sexual. People often hold hands while praying, for instance. See the difference?)

Can you have and give oral sex and still remain a virgin?

The definition of a virgin is a person who has not experienced

sexual intercourse. It's really more of a biological term than anything else, because the real heart issue is about purity. You can't participate in oral sex outside of marriage and still be pure. So people can be technically virgins and still engage in very sexual behaviors. For example, there is an epidemic of gonorrhea of the throat among American junior-high age kids who are still genital virgins but have infected oral sex. The good news is, someone who has had oral sex outside of marriage can confess it as sin, be cleansed and have his or her purity restored.

Is it okay to have oral sex if you're in a committed marriage?

Yes, as long as both spouses are okay with it. If either one doesn't want it, it would be selfish and unloving for the other one to insist. Also, please see our article, "[What's God's Plan for Sex in Marriage?](#)"

And if it's wrong can you tell me where in the Bible it says this?

If you read the Song of Solomon, you can see that God encourages married people to enjoy His gift of sex in all its glory. Jody and Linda Dillow (authors of *Solomon on Sex* and *Intimate Issues*) believe that there are two veiled references to oral sex in the Song of Solomon. Keep in mind that in this biblical book, "garden" usually refers to the wife's genitals, and "fruit" to the husband's:

(Bride) Awake, O north wind
And come, wind of the south
Make my garden breathe out fragrance
Let its spices be wafted abroad
May my beloved come into his garden
And eat its choice fruits! (4:16)

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest
So is my beloved among the young men

In his shade I took great delight and sat down
And his fruit was sweet to my taste. (2:3)

*I'm sorry about the many questions but these questions have
been nagging me for quite a while.*

I'm glad we could help!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Help! My Boyfriend's Not a Virgin and It's Killing Me!”

Dear Dr. Bohlin,

I read [your article regarding sexual purity](#), and I am forever grateful to God that He has given me strength to resist the temptation for 27 years of my life. Boyfriends come and go, yet I still manage to keep that area pure. I am now in a very serious relationship with a guy that I have known for a long time. He is a great person, very smart, and an active member of church. As we discussed the subject of sex, I recently learned that he's not a virgin, as I had suspected from the tears in his eyes. He told me that he had to come clean before we go further in our relationship. It was his biggest mistake that he gave in to temptation, and he withdrew from all church activities and didn't take the holy communion until he felt that God has forgiven him.

The thing is, the fact really tore my heart. I told him that I needed time to get used to this, to re-think about the whole relationship, and to pray to God for strength. I love him very much, and he loves me.

Even though now the sting doesn't hurt me like in the beginning, sometimes my own imagination still tortures me. I never asked him if he slept with anybody else beside that one person. Part of me wants to know more details about his sexual past (all these times, I assume he only slept with one woman), but the other part of me is afraid of the consequences from knowing more details. What should I do? How much details should I know? He has assured me that we will put God first in this relationship, and we will help strengthen and guard each other as we grow closer in the relationship to resist sexual temptations. So far, we've been doing very well.

He's not a player type, everybody knows that. But why did he fall into temptation. . . somehow I don't understand the contradiction. He's not the type that would do such a thing, he even told me that, but somehow, it was like being hypnotized, he gave in to sin. *sigh* Tonight, my imagination is running wild again, the thought of him sharing his body and soul with someone really hurt me. So I decided to write you for advice. Please help me.

Hello _____,

Thank you for writing and I hope I can be of some help to you. I will comment on your situation from a man's perspective, since you are wondering how such a godly man could fall into such a sin. I have asked my wife Sue (below) to comment on your particular predicament dealing with lingering questions and suspicion.

Unfortunately, especially for young men, sexual temptation is very strong. You made no comment about the nature of the relationship that led him onto sin but I would imagine that the woman was not exactly coerced and probably was the instigator of the sexual relationship. Men in general, and introverted men in particular, can be very susceptible to sin if the woman is the one pursuing or pushing it. The physical attraction for sex is much stronger for men than for women.

Women are usually searching for greater personal intimacy while men can be very focused on the physical. If the woman is bypassing the personal intimacy for the sexual, the male finds it very difficult to resist. I have thanked the Lord many times that I have never been pursued sexually. In my younger days this would have been an extreme temptation.

Your boyfriend sounds like a wonderful young man who has sinned, repented and seeks to go on with his life. You can help him greatly by truly forgiving him and deciding to trust him. Everything else you told me makes him sound like a very trustworthy man who fell as we all do. Sue has more to say about your turmoil below.

Dr. Ray Bohlin

Dear _____,

Ray asked for my input as well to give you the fullest answer possible.

I think the enemy is using your boyfriend's fall to torture you, and he's winning. I also think that knowing more details will only make it worse for you because it will fuel your imagination, not bring healing. You are being tempted to obsess over his sin as if you have never sinned . . . and the only person who has a right to do that is Jesus, and He doesn't even think about it! He paid for your boyfriend's sin, and it cost him not only His life but tremendous torture and suffering first. Since your boyfriend has repented and received forgiveness, for you to hold him and yourself in bondage over this incident is elevating yourself above God. I'm sure you don't mean to do that!

There is a difference between goals and desires, and great trouble happens when we confuse them. We can set goals that we have control over, like graduating from college or learning to rollerblade, but we can't set goals for other people's behavior . . . like a future mate keeping their virginity. It

sounds to me like you might have made your future husband's virginity a goal instead of a desire. And when we can't have what we desire, the appropriate response is sadness and then forgiveness, not obsession and anger.

That being said, you have a decision to make. Is marrying a virgin a non-negotiable for you? Is it the most important asset in a potential spouse? Is it so important that you would let go of a long list of positive qualities because they don't count as much as virginity? If so, then stop your relationship right now and acknowledge what it is you want, and tell your boyfriend he can never be good enough for you because he sinned.

On the other hand, if you recognize that you are a sinner as well and you have no right to demand perfection from a husband because you cannot be a perfect wife, then choose to let go of his sin and bury it. And promise both him and yourself to never bring it up again. If you need help forgiving him (and believe me, you haven't forgiven him or you wouldn't be tortured by this), then get Chuck Lynch's excellent book *I Should Forgive, But...* His chapter "I'm Living With the Memories" will help you, but I can tell you right now that the main point is that you can't change what happened, but you can choose how you will live with what happened:

- Bitterness and bondage (being out of control)

-or-

- Forgiveness and freedom (being under control)

In order to truly forgive, we need to choose to accept what happened instead of fighting it.

It sounds like this is a wonderful, godly man who fell into temptation and has resolved not to ever do it again. The fact that he was deeply wounded by his sin and has learned from it makes him an even better man. If you are a woman who deserves him, you will take the hurt over his sin to Jesus and turn it over to Him and promise never to take it back so that you can move forward.

As I read back over what I wrote, I realize it sounds waaaaay stronger than I would ordinarily be with someone I don't know and whose trust I haven't earned, but I did sense the Lord leading me as I wrote this answer. I sure wouldn't want you trashing a great relationship because of some perceived notion that you are better than him. Virginity is a wonderful gift to give, but it's only one of many blessings that people can give each other in marriage. A wise woman concentrates on what she has instead of what she doesn't have. . . and I do hope you are a wise woman! <gentle smile>

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

“Can You Recommend Some Books to Help Us Teach Our Kids About Sex?”

Can you recommend some books that would be appropriate to use to help teach our children about the birds and the bees? Are there any written from a Christian perspective? Our children are in 3rd and 5th grades. Thanks for your help!

According to our good friends at Logos Bookstore in Dallas, there is a wonderful series called “God’s Design for Sex” by Stan and Brenna Jones, published by NavPress. The first book is for ages 3-5, the second for ages 5-8. The third book, for ages 8-11, is called *What’s the Big Deal? Why God Cares About Sex*. The fourth book, for ages 11-14, is called *Facing the Facts: The Truth About Sex and You*.

Glad to be able to help!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Where Does the Bible Say that All Sexual Activity Outside of Marriage is Sin?”

In your site you talk about how all forms of sexual activity is a sin and that the bible says that “all sexual activity outside of marriage is sin.” Please give me verses where this is true because all I can find is how intercourse is wrong outside of marriage. Please also explain how we can define fornication as any sexual activity, who defined this, and how do we know this is God’s definition. I appreciate your help.

If you do a word study on “fornication” or “immorality” (which are two ways the Greek word *porneia* is translated), you will find that it means illicit sexual activity. [Note: two very good web sites for doing Bible study are www.blueletterbible.org and www.studylight.org.] Many dictionaries will say “illicit sexual intercourse,” but that is unnecessarily narrow. Consider, for example, that Romans 1:29 condemns fornication in the same passage where lesbianism is shown to be sin. Since two women are unable to have sexual intercourse with each other in the same way that a man and a woman do, I believe it would be disingenuous to try and make a case that lesbian sex is not fornication or immorality simply because of physiology of sex prevents them from having intercourse.

Secondly, consider why it's wrong in the first place: God is pure, and sexual activity outside of marriage is impure. God commands sex to be contained within marriage because it is so powerful; in fact, it is the glue that holds people together and binds their spirits to each other (1 Corinthians 6:16).

Third, if one is trying to make a case that sexual activity short of intercourse is not sin, then I would ask, where do you draw the line? Ask the father of a teenage daughter if it's sin for her boyfriend to touch her genitals, or if God allows this activity with His blessing. Ask the wife of a man visiting a prostitute if it's OK for him to receive oral sex from her as long as they don't engage in intercourse. And if you are bothered by our position that masturbation falls in the category of *porneia*, then I would reply that we have [written so extensively](#) on that subject that I'm not going to go further with it. I will say, however, that we recognize not everyone agrees with us on this issue. Nonetheless, we still have a hard time reconciling masturbation with Paul's injunction to "do everything to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Exactly how does one do that to the glory of God?

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"My Wife is Seriously Ill: Does That Mean No More Sex

Forever?"

I have a serious problem I would like to ask your opinion about. My brain-damaged wife has been unconscious for 5 months and will remain so for the rest of her life. Is it a sin if I masturbate to overcome the sexual need? I have read ["Is Masturbation OK When My Wife and I Are Apart?"](#) Does that mean that I may not enjoy sex ever again?

Please accept my deepest condolences on the tragedy you and your wife are experiencing. I pray God's continuing comfort for you.

I know this is not what you want to hear, but let me ask you a question: if your wife is not available for sex because of her physical condition, how does that make you any different from unmarried men? How does that make you any different from the Lord Jesus, who lived His entire life without being married and thus without any sexual experience?

The way you glorify God in your sexuality when you are unable to enjoy sex with your wife is by giving it to Him as an offering. Does it mean you will go without sex? Quite possibly, unless you remarry after your wife's death.

It is VERY difficult for those who have experienced sex to go without it after divorce or the death of a spouse, but God's plan and command is that sex be limited to marriage. I would also point out that while we do grapple with sexual desires and urges, it is not a NEED like food and water and sleep. Calling it a need only makes it worse because we buy into the lie that we must have it, when God has made it off limits for some people.

Again, I am so very sorry for your pain and the fact that you would even be in such a difficult situation that you'd have to wonder about this question.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries