
Is Chastity Obsolete?

Alberta Mazat

You've probably heard opinions like these:

"Chastity? Even the word is outdated, let alone the expectation!"

"We're not teenagers, we're mature enough to handle sex."

These voices reflect the feelings of many unmarried young people, and not only those without strong religious convictions. Some dedicated young Christians feel it is morally acceptable to be sexually involved and single. Some do not. Some wish they could roll back the clock and erase that part of their history. Others continue to be sexually active.

Let's look at some of these issues: Does God mandate a certain sexual life-style? How far can one go with sexual stimulation and still feel good about it? What can you do if you have already engaged in activities you now feel are inappropriate?

Agreed: Abstinence Is a Tough Choice

I don't think abstinence has ever been easy. In fact, I am convinced that it has never been more difficult! The call of chemistry is strong. Sex does include hormones! But God, who made us to be sexually delighted persons, also had a plan for the best time for this to happen. It is much more than a biological event; it involves our emotions, our intellect, and our spiritual understanding. God did not intend for us to be at the mercy of our glands, so He gave us some guidance.

Besides internal tensions, peer pressure is also hard to deal with. It is harder when young persons haven't learned how to feel good about themselves. There may be no way to get the pressure off completely. However, it may make you feel better to know that abstainers are *not* a dying breed. They are just a quieter, less militant group. Some of the sharpest and classiest students on campus are virgins by

intent, not default. In other words, everyone is *not* doing it!

Then there is the "carried away" syndrome. Despite everything they have decided, some young people say it "just happened." Is it possible for someone, against all good resolutions, to find him or herself having intercourse? If this is so, how can God expect chastity? It is more likely that this syndrome is the result of not having enough respect for body chemistry, or not thinking out, well in advance, definite plans for resistance.

How about curiosity as a driving reason for sex? In the world we live in, almost everyone talks about sex, sings about it, reads about it. Wondering what it's like gets pretty compelling. "What if I never get married?" some young people wonder, "Does that mean I'll never have sex?" God understands your concern, and still says, "Not before marriage." He knows that even if you did have sex outside of marriage, you would *still* not know the deep delight that can be present in the totality of marital sexuality. The two cannot be compared.

We are not talking here about the short-term thrill that can so easily turn into a disappointment under the wrong circumstances. We are talking about the thrill in a setting of commitment, security, protection, and respect—the total "knowing," which protects against disappointment, remorse, exploitation, disrupted lives, and disease.

We have some pretty solid evidence that cohabiting before marriage does not pay off the way it promised to. Many young people who chose this experience did so because they felt it would ensure compatibility and build interpersonal skills for marriage. But research studies show that divorce is more likely when couples first live together before marriage. Sex before marriage doesn't strengthen the relationship. In this

case, practice does *not* make perfect!

Is God Really Against Premarital Sex?

As one young person put it in a question-and-answer session, "Does God look bad on premarital sex?" My answer was, "I believe that God looks 'sad' upon premarital sex." He has the greatest expectations for the deep joy that marital sexuality can bring to a wife and a husband. When He sees this beautiful union (which He uses as a symbol of Christ's everlasting love for His church) used merely to gratify urges that were meant to be controlled, it must make Him very sad. When He sees psychological pain caused by overeager young people hurting one another with broken promises, when He sees the harm of being forced or pressured into unsatisfactory sexual experiences that can leave psychological scars, He must feel angry. When He sees couples marrying without preparing adequately for their total marriage relationship, but simply because they are sexually eager, He must be grieved.

Scripture reveals in unmistakable terms God's ideal for sexuality. Genesis 2:24 outlines God's three-point plan. Husbands and wives were: (1) to leave past relationships, (2) to experience a marriage covenant, and only then (3) to become one flesh. The Song of Solomon portrays this same sequence. Chapter 3:6-11 pictures the wedding procession and the ceremony. Only then is the Shulamite maiden addressed as Solomon's bride. Now she is delighted to invite her groom to "partake of the fruits of her garden." Until then she is a "locked garden," a virgin.

Some unmarried people have felt that the seventh commandment does not speak to them, since they are not contemplating involvement with a married person. Careful biblical

scholars realize that "Thou shalt not commit adultery" means far more than illicit sex with a married person. One theological dictionary says it this way: "It is an unconditional repudiation of all extra-marital and unnatural intercourse."

Are There Other Reasons to Wait?

Many reasons have been proposed for postponing sexual expressions of love until marriage. However, warning against premature pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases has not curtailed premarital sex. We've probably never had more of either. While these age-old reasons are certainly more compelling now than ever before, they are not the whole answer.

When couples begin to spend time in physical expression, too often this becomes their main means of communication, depriving them of other levels of communication on which they need to spend time. They need to become aware of each other's goals, values, and life-styles. It is far more important for their future happiness to explore each other's minds and souls than each other's bodies.

Too often, engaging in sex before marriage results in two persons marrying who really were not meant for one another. One couple reports: "We felt that since we had already acted as man and wife sexually, we were bound to one another in marriage. We had to legitimize our actions. Our physical relationship was blinding us to real problems in our relationship."

Other couples have discovered that past intimate premarital experiences with other partners now sometimes intervene in their married lovemaking. Unfavorable comparisons can interfere with this most intimate communication.

Another concern: "How can I be sure that he or she will be faithful to me now that we are married, when I know

there were others before me?" Those who have engaged in sex premaritally are more likely to be involved in extramarital sex. Trust is such an important ingredient in marriage that every effort should be taken to preserve it—in advance!

And then there is the pain of breaking up a serious relationship, which can be very intense, the more so (especially for young women) if there has been sexual intercourse. Young women usually give more of themselves—their total personhood—in sexual relatedness. However, young men, too, can be devastated by a break-up. God did not intend sexual experience to cause pain. He intended for it to bring pleasure, and He knew the best place for that was within the protected climate of a loving marriage relationship.

But We're in Love!

Perhaps this is a good time to talk about what love really is. Love should not be confused with a pounding heart—which can also be caused by a siren pulling you over to the curb when you have been driving too fast! Having someone give you a cashier's check for one million dollars could also give you "that good feeling all over" as some have described love. No, love is made of sterner stuff! Real love is outgoing, not self-centered. Rather than saying "I need, I want, I can't do without," it seeks to contribute to the well-being and happiness of someone else—

which becomes part of one's own joy.

Love energizes! It includes liking and respecting. There is no hidden agenda of wanting to effect major changes in the other to make her or him more acceptable. Love does not pressure the other to act in ways that go against his or her values or morals. That's a pretty big order! This is why it's so important to recognize the problems that result when these love-ingredients are absent.

Some have asked this question, "Is it wrong to have premarital sex when you are engaged and 100 percent sure of being married?" I believe that it is unwise, premature, and against God's plan for assuring the best of sexuality not simply now, but also later.

Marriage is never "100 percent sure" until the vows are said before your minister. Nearly one-third of all engagements are broken, some on the wedding day! (These may have been wise decisions that avoided later pain.) Engagement is a time to explore carefully whether the relationship has what it takes for a good marriage. Leave celebration for the real thing, sealed and signed with altar vows.

How About "Everything But"?

Young people are always eager to find out how close they can come to intercourse, without actually doing it! One young person called this kind of sex "veggie-sex...everything but!" We need to realize that intercourse is

not a separate event—it is part of a process.

There are four phases to a sexual event. First, the excitement phase, signaled by an erection in the male and genital lubrication in the female. Unless some barrier presents itself, the couple desires to be even closer together.

The next phase is the plateau stage, a fancy word for the love-play that comes before intercourse. This should be



the most lengthy part of the cycle, characterized by pleasurable sexual touching, verbal messages of love and caring, and those exciting things that prepare the couple for intercourse and orgasm. The plateau phase is God's plan for readying the bodies of both female and male for the complete act of union. It is not a recreation pursuit for thrill seekers. The culmination of this phase goes directly into the orgasmic phase.

The final phase is the resolution stage. Couples can appreciate this stage most fully when they are assured that whatever the outcome, they are ready to take responsibility for it. God's plan was that this total process would occur in a committed relationship in which the couple gives each other all the emotional, spiritual, and social support possible in marriage.

The big problem is this: At what point in the plateau stage does love-making cease to be simply a pleasurable experience and become a prelude to intercourse? When two people feel so drawn to each other that they cannot continue to enjoy the initial stages of hand-holding and hugging or kissing without reaching for breasts and genitals, then they are invading marital space. If they don't realize when this urgency has become overpowering, they are not mature enough to engage in any physical closeness.

"Then you are saying that hugging and kissing is OK?" you may ask. No, that's not what I am saying! There are many different kinds of hugging and kissing. Different persons will react differently to the amount and degree of these caresses. It is important for each individual to know what is a distinct "turn-on" for him or her. Then, in advance, each must make specific decisions about how they plan to handle further involvement. Some may choose diversions, discussion, or even a demand that activities stop! More than one young person has wished in retrospect that she or he had planned a way to get out of this kind of situation with dignity intact.

It is important to discover what makes you most vulnerable to sexual feelings. Many discover that music,

television, reading choices, suggestive conversations, or uninhibited day-dreaming will do it. (When you are on a diet, you shouldn't spend a lot of time in ice-cream parlors!) Others report that productive and recreational pursuits help to sublimate these intense feelings. Each person must be prepared for the strength and persistence of feelings of desire. But you are in charge of your own thinking, which is good news!

Some Other Voices

Are church-type people the only ones who propose waiting till marriage? Let's face it, the call for chastity has not generally come from voices that have a lot of credibility with young people! Little old ladies, inhibited clerics, deans, teachers, and parents whom everyone knows have long since had their hormones dried up—these used to be the ones who talked against premarital sex.

But this is no longer the case. Several professionals who are paying attention to what is going on around them are also saying very interesting things about chastity. Here is a sampling. Dr. Joel Moskowitz was director of clinical services in an eastern university mental health center when he published the article, "Secondary Virginity." He stated that after a period of disillusioning sexual activity, some young people have decided to remain chaste until they marry. He calls this "secondary virginity" and says it is catching on.

Dr. Charles Millard in a university on the other side of the continent says, "On campuses there is presently being manifested a return to spiritual values and awareness of the fact that transient sexual relationships do not lead to satisfactory or permanent arrangements. The absence of commitment is now being recognized as one of the many weaknesses of the so-called liberation."

Now from Professor Richard Hettlinger in the Midwest, this word: "To preserve the ultimate sexual intimacy for the ultimate commitment of marriage, or to adopt a view of chastity with full recognition of what is being excluded from one's life, are

the choices of a strong and independent self, not of weakness." All of these messages, by the way, were published in a secular journal.

We are finally hearing from voices that have been almost drowned out by the many loud spokespersons for sexual liberty. The sexual revolution did not produce its promised trouble-free pleasure for all. The sexual revolution is over!

But wait, perhaps the revolution has just started! Liberation is now freedom from having to follow the lead of those uninterested in a loving God who knows what is best for us. We are liberated from a path that so often causes emotional pain, estrangement, insecurity, and disease.

What If?

It's possible that someone reading this article wishes that she or he had made a different choice about sexual activity. Perhaps it is you. You may now be realizing that in seeking freedom of sexual expression, you actually gave part of it away. The freedoms you lost away could be freedom from emotional trauma, from worry over consequences, from remorse, and from the privilege of living without regrets. Perhaps you made this decision because you were not given good counsel, or before you were mature enough to think things through. Does this mean you are doomed to guilt, to the results of your action forever?

The answer is, "No, not so!" Obviously, some results cannot be altered, but God does not consider you "forever impure." We spoke earlier of a group who consider themselves revirginated—and that's great. But it may not be good enough for Christians. I believe that those who decide to "wait" from some point on can think of themselves as *spiritually* revirginated. This is what God offers to those who now want to follow His blueprint for their sexual lives. Many places in Scripture proclaim the good news that God remembers our confessed misdeeds no more, be they sexual or otherwise (Jeremiah 31:34).

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dence. The institute has conducted numerous field conferences in North America as well as some in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

The institute also publishes three periodicals that are presently on a biannual schedule. *Origins* is a technical journal providing articles and literature reviews at the collegiate and graduate-school level. News about GRI activities is provided in *Geoscience Reports*—which addresses the general public and the elementary and secondary-school levels. *Ciencia de los Orígenes* is a Spanish publication edited by David Rhys, Ph.D., with both general and technical information. Readers who wish sample copies and subscription information should write to the Geoscience Research Institute; Loma Linda University; Loma Linda, CA 92350; U.S.A. Telephone: (714) 824-4548; Fax: (714) 824-4577. Other publications such as reprints from technical journals, books, and papers on selected topics are also available from the institute. Some audio-visual materials have also been produced. Information can be obtained by writing to the above address.

The work of GRI is particularly significant to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Most Christian denominations have yielded to the secular influence of evolution by accommodating with views which suggest that life developed with the aid of God over millions of years. Such views conflict with the Bible and are especially challenging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, since the Sabbath

—one of the church's most distinctive doctrines—is based primarily on a literal six-day Creation. Once the geologic layers of the Earth are interpreted as needing long ages for formation, this excludes the possibility of an all-inclusive, six-day Creation week as given in Genesis and the Ten Commandments. This is because unique forms of organisms are introduced at different assumed "ages" and could no longer have been created within six days.

Denominations that have adopted views asserting that life developed gradually over millions of years usually hold that the first part of Genesis is allegorical. Such views not only undermine the biblical account of beginnings, but are deprecating to the Bible as a whole, because the leading Bible personalities (e.g., the apostles Paul and Peter, Christ and God) either directly or by implication refer to Genesis 1-11 as factual. The testimony of these authorities authenticates the truthfulness of the biblical account of beginnings.

The work of GRI is becoming particularly significant as the conflict between evolution and the Bible comes more to the forefront. Research at the institute has produced a significant body of scientific evidence that corroborates the biblical account of beginnings. Not all the problems that scientific interpretations pose to the Bible have been solved, but evidence supporting intelligent design for life and of a worldwide flood as described in Genesis have become very impressive.

Is Chastity . . . ?

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Those who advise single persons to wait until marriage to express themselves in total intimacy offer them the freedom to enter into the celebration of marriage. As in the case of most important celebrations, this one is better when all the details are carefully planned. In addition, celibacy should be considered as an option. There are happy and fulfilled Christians who have chosen to remain single.

This is what maturity is all about—the ability to take in information, weigh options, evaluate and execute decisions. It does not always come with age, but more years usually make it easier.

A suggestion: From now on, instead of thinking of your pre-marriage life as simply marking time until your wedding day, visualize yourself as growing, developing, and enriching all the aspects of your personhood. Then you will be gloriously ready for whatever God is planning for your future.

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Pontius' Puddle

