

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

88.3 What Does the Bible Say About the Causes of Marital Unhappiness?**Part III**

Scripture: Song of Solomon 2:8-17

We have been thinking about the causes of marital unhappiness. It has been heavy. It would come as no surprise to hear of those who are unwilling to pursue in this analysis of those conditions which destroy a relationship like the one marriage brings. Nevertheless, we will persist in this direction and take as our concern this week one of the real trouble spots, that of sexual fulfillment. I do not believe that marital problems always begin at this point in spite of the fact that sex does play an important role in the failure of some marriages.

My concern in dealing with this subject arises out of the lack of understanding many people have concerning their sexuality, and the teaching of God's Word which offers a desperately needed answer to this bewilderment. I would like to share with you certain principles which are found in the Bible and provide for us a Christian view of sex. It is not our purpose to reflect on the great amount of material available having to do with the techniques of love-making. I am aware that some pastors emphasize this aspect of the problem and feel it is important in their counseling. I do not involve myself in this area which is predominately a physiological and clinical matter. Sexual fulfillment is, in my judgment, participatory, more than it is an observatory matter, and the most reasonable way for two people to make the necessary discoveries is by their own love making. It goes without saying that this approach has been satisfactory for centuries, the present generation notwithstanding.

I would suggest that if we really want to find out about human sexuality we ought to take the time to read from the book which lifts sex to its highest and most lofty place. The book is the Bible. Unfortunately, it is the last place many people would consider looking when it comes to this subject. Even people who respect and are somewhat familiar with the Bible overlook the Old Testament book which describes the love of a man for a woman in language that is straightforward and with an amazing lack of prudishness, the kind people often associate with the Bible. This book of the Bible is the Song of Songs or the Song

of Solomon. The interpretation of this love poem has long intrigued Biblical scholars. There is perhaps no book of the Bible which has given birth to more diversity of opinion than this brief song of eight chapters. For my own part, I see a duality of intent. It is God's purpose to give expression to pure marital love as designed by Him without lust or selfishness, and at the same time to portray the heavenly lover of souls, the Lord Jesus and His bride, the Church. The word "erotic" is popular today. The Song of Solomon ought to be popular for that reason. The book is erotic, divinely and purely erotic. The message of Solomon's Song can help us. The focus of love is seen in the words, *"My beloved is mine and I am his..."* (2:16) Now, the reason some marriages fail is because of affectional disability of some kind. The Song of love has become a sad song. For some it is the saddest song of all. Perhaps some Biblical facts about sex can be of some help. Let us consider them.

VIII. OUR IDENTITY AS PERSONS IS PRIMARY: Galatians 3:28

We are living in a time when people are obsessed with their bodies. I suppose there are millions alive today who do not think of themselves as being any more than warm blooded animals, and when it comes to sex, they mate like animals and there is no point of making any more of it than that. For this reason the lifestyle of people today is to accept a display of sex openly and without embarrassment even though it may be joltingly animal. This is the reason why the song of love is such a sad song. Something beautiful has been twisted and is not recognizable any more. People are hopelessly hung up on sex and this is not the way it should be at all. God never meant that our bodies should be scaffolds to hold up our sexuality. The Christian view, the way God looks at us, is that we are not primarily male or female at all. We are the people of God and have become so by faith in Jesus. The point is that our true identification is that of a Christian person before being male or female. The identity we have in Christ is primary, our sex is secondary. Christians are the people of God before they are sexual entities, and Paul speaks of this in Galatians 3:28 *"There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ."* Fascinating, that we can be more than sexual beings and that this is the way God sees us. He sees us as having the potential of great dignity because we are created in His own image. He sees us as having great destiny as we live out our days on earth and enjoy Him forever. He sees us as being the person we were born to be, a person fulfilled and made complete in Christ. (Colossians 2:10) He sees our sexuality as an important part of that

fulfillment, not to be divorced from the totality of our experience, but not to be our experience exclusively. If the Christian faith teaches anything, it teaches that sex is not the criteria by which we identify ourselves. Let a wayward society proclaim as it will that sexual pleasures are the ultimate. No informed Christian will fall for that. His faith has found a place, a proper place, for human sexuality, but it is not the main attraction, identity as God's person has that place.

IX. GOD HAS WOVEN SEXUALITY INTO THE FABRIC OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Our generation did not invent sex. It was a long time ago that God created something which He called good and which we have come to know in part as sexual drive and experience. The Bible puts it this way, *“And God saw everything He had made and behold it was very good.”* (Gen. 1:31) This experience is one of the legitimate joys God has made for mankind. In the sight of God sex is good and beautiful. Proverbs 5:8-19 teaches, *“Let your wife be blessed and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be tender, gentle, and attractive. Let her affection fill you at all times with delight. Be infatuated always with her love.”* Hebrews 13:4 reads, *“Marriage is honorable in all and the marriage bed is undefiled.”* We have been studying I Corinthians, chapter 7, for several weeks. Verse 5 teaches that the husband is to render to his wife the marriage obligations which are due her and that neither is to deprive the other of the joys which marriage allows. It is most unfortunate that history leave so much to be desired in understanding that marital sex is as pure as eating and drinking. People who have been taught that sex is intrinsically bad have just not understood the Scriptures and they have distorted the faith. The faulty understanding of original sin as being transmitted through the sexual act is entirely unfounded. The Bible teaches that sex is good and God given.

Marriage counseling has revealed that many people have uneasy feelings about sexual expression in marriage. They have difficulty in being fully persuaded that relations of this kind are all that noble and the idea persists in a kind of underground fashion that connubial love and sexual union are wrong. There was an ancient sect known as the Manichaeans who felt that the whole realm of love, marriage, and sex was the work of the devil and an occasion of sin. The idea persists even in this enlightened age. Several reasons have been suggested which cause such an attitude. **First**, there is the immediate transition one must accept in that before marriage sexual relations are absolutely forbidden. Immediately following a ceremony of some kind, what was prohibited and opposed is to be

enjoyed fully. Such an adjustment is difficult to make so abruptly. **Secondly**, in stressing the virtue of abstaining from premarital sex, the impression may be given that sex itself is wrong. A revulsion may result that is difficult to overcome and makes fulfillment extremely painful. Faulty education can implant ideas about sex which bring resentment. The Puritans, for instance, were of the opinion that sex was not to be enjoyed. This view arose from a most unfortunate understanding of the doctrine of original sin, supposing that sin was transmitted by the sexual act. David's statement in Psalm 51:5, "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me,*" does not mean that sexual relations are sinful. The statement refers to the fact that the entire human race, David included, points to a single head who passed the stain of original sin on to all men born of woman. It also has to do with the fact of sin which dogs us from the cradle to the grave, the state into which we are born. Thirdly, the whole concept of celibacy gives the impression that there is something intrinsically evil about sex and that a certain person desires the holy life must avoid sex completely. Celibacy is practiced to free the individual from the cares of family living and, as we have said, it is a gift from God enabling one to devote himself a special work which has been given.

There is a difference between a man and a woman. God made that difference. He wanted us to be attracted to each other by virtue of this difference. He is the one who fashioned woman to be woman with her tender ways, her beautiful eyes and lovely hair. The woman is God's artistry. He caused the man to be strong, with distinct features, broad shoulders and noble brow. You see, it is all the design of God and it is beautiful. The sexual differences are obvious, there is nothing wrong with them from God's point of view nor from the Christian perspective. Sex is woven into the fabric of human relationships, it is good and beautiful in God's sight.

X. REBELLION AGAINST GOD HAS BROUGHT A FAULTY VIEW OF SEX:

Romans 1:24

A great deal has happened to debase sex. A good thing has become a very great grief. A God given instinct has degenerated into something which God never intended. His purpose was the betterment of our lives, but we have come to view it as just another appetite to be satisfied, a physical and rather mechanical thing to do at the proper time and place. Exactly what is proper is up to the parties involved and their agreement that what is enjoyable and harmful to no one is the way to go. Thus, it is not at all unusual for two people to have sex and have little

or no real feeling for one another. It becomes on this level pure genital activity and the Bible teaches that the person who has a relationship through this means exclusively is guilty of lust, uncleanness and doing dishonor to their bodies and those of others. When men forget they have been created in the image of God, sex is reduced to the level of a play thing, people become objects who excite each other, and there is no limit to the rawness and vileness which can come.

The God who has created us as sexual beings has spoken to us about sexual matters. He tells us very clearly, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."* (Exodus 20:14) He calls impurity a sin against the body (I Corinthians 6:18), against the soul (Proverbs 6:32), against Himself and His image within us which excludes some from the kingdom of heaven (Revelation 22:15). God enjoins us to a life of purity in mind and affections (Matthew 5:27-28) and in what we chose to look upon (II Peter 2:14). But alas a great cry ascends toward heaven and a complaining world will not suffer the demands of God nor submit to His authority. Such rebellion against God has turned sexual life into animal lust.

XI. SEXUAL FULFILLMENT CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST:

The commandment I quoted was laid upon God's people for a reason. There was great wisdom behind this prohibition. It was Jesus who said that a man and woman become *"one flesh"* in marriage. In the sexual act two bodies merge to become one and the act is crowned with a moment of ecstasy at which time emotions and minds become one as well. That is why sex cannot be thought of in a purely physical way only. It cannot be separated from the totality of a person's experience. It is not merely a pleasurable act, it is an emotional, psychological, and spiritual, act as well. The total person is involved in the union. If this is true, it follows that there is nothing left for anyone else. It is upon this reasoning that God calls for purity before and after marriage. A distraught woman said to me one day, "I love my husband with my body, but not with myself." That is what I am saying. Such a thing is possible but it is then only biological and without feeling, value's, and proper attitudes, it is an expression of lack of love rather than of love. Love is dynamical and will grow or diminish. It grows when we are able to give ourselves to someone we trust ourselves with. It is built upon trust and adultery in deed or otherwise is anything that offends the trust and confidence we have in one another.

XII. SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE ARE FORBIDDEN AND COSTLY:

God has not arbitrarily forbidden sex outside of marriage. We have said that sexual fulfillment involves the total person, it is an expression of love and that it grows in an atmosphere of trust. When we have sex outside of marriage we have a situation where two people pretend to be married who are not. This relationship is based upon a delusion, it is founded upon a falsehood. There can be no trust for both are playing the dishonest game. When we pretend to be married and we are not, we open ourselves to the emptiness which living in a world of fantasy brings.

Secondly, there is the matter of guilt. Conscience brings awareness of the moral worth of our actions. It further encourages us to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong. Some violate their conscience so that the sensitivity is no longer there, but most people feel some pangs when they are sexually promiscuous. The story of David and Bathsheba is a case in point.

Thirdly, there is the displeasure of God to face. Hebrews 13:4 states, *“Marriage is honorable in all and the marriage bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”* Ephesians 5:5 and Revelation 21:8 speak of the day God will judge impurity. Sex outside of marriage is disobedience toward God.

We must never forget however, that God will forgive the past when we come to Him in a repentant way. The story of the woman cast at the feet of Jesus as an adulteress is known to many. (John 8:11b) It wasn't that Jesus condoned what she had done. It was a word of forgiveness directed to one who sought it.

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