

Did the Church Recast Sex as a “Shameful Act”?

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The once hallowed act of Hieros Gamos—the natural sexual union between man and woman through which each became spiritually whole—had been recast as a shameful act. Holy men who had once required sexual union with their female counterparts to commune with God now feared their natural sexual urges as the work of the devil, collaborating with his favorite accomplice...woman.¹—Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 125.

[Hieros Gamos] (Greek: “sacred marriage”) Sexual relations of fertility deities enacted in myths and rituals, characteristic of societies based on cereal agriculture (e.g., Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, and Canaan). At least once a year, people dressed as gods engaged in sexual intercourse to guarantee the fertility of the land. The festival began with a procession to the marriage celebration, which was followed by an exchange of gifts, a purification rite, the wedding feast, preparation of the wedding chamber, and a secret nocturnal act of intercourse.² —*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*.

Hieros Gamos or **Hierogamy** means a coupling (sometimes marriage) of a god and a man, often having a symbolic meaning. It is an ancient ritual in which participants believed that they could gain profound religious experience through sexual intercourse. Participants assumed characteristics of deities, often channeling the deities in question, and by their union provided symbolic and literal fertility for themselves, the land, and their people. This was often done by the monarch and hierodule [“holy female slave”—a temple slave in the service of a specific deity, often with the connotation of religious prostitution] of the dominant religion. The etymology is from Greek: “*hieros*” = holy and “*gamos*” = marriage, coupling.³

What does God tell us about sex in the Bible?

The first thing we learn from the Bible about sex is that sex is good and something given as a gift from God:

...let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does (1 Cor. 7:2-4, NASB).

If God purposely created sex so pleasurable, then He certainly intends it to be enjoyed in marriage.

Second, God commands that we are to be sexually chaste prior to marriage:

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this manner no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 4:3-8).

According to this verse and verses like Galatians 6:7, this means that those who have violated this command have really never escaped the consequences: we think it is far better to not have to suffer those consequences.

One potent illustration is the apparently significantly shortened life span of homosexuals as a population—even apart from the AIDS epidemic. Striking research has indicated the median age of death for gay men *with* AIDS is 39; yet even *without* AIDS it is only 42!⁴ This is perhaps one reason God warns, that gay men “received in themselves the penalty for their perversion” (Rom. 1:27). And He specifically warns Christians:

The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.... *Flee* from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually, sins *against his own body*. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you are bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body (1 Cor. 6:13, 18-20, emphasis added).

Thus,

But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these things are improper for God's holy people (Eph. 5:3).

And,

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature:

sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming (Col. 3:5-6).

These verses are obviously written to Christians because Christians can fall into sexual temptation and sin just like non-Christians. Yet what Christians need to remember here is not only the earthly consequences of illicit sex, emotional, physical and spiritual, but the fact that they will one day have to stand before their Lord Jesus Christ and give an account of what they have done in their body: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

Of course, Christians will not be judged eternally for their sins. The penalty for *all* their sins was *fully* paid for by Jesus Christ at the cross (Eph. 1:7; Col. 2:13). But Christians may still lose rewards in heaven. Indeed, we can only wonder what some Christians will feel like and experience on that day when they lose those heavenly rewards because of the spiritually numbing and other consequences of fornication or adultery while on earth? It will certainly be an infinitely poor exchange—losing eternal rewards in heaven for a few fleeting moments of sexual pleasure on earth.

This explains why God reminds all Christians that they will experience an accounting for the life they lived:

If any man builds on this foundation [of Jesus Christ] using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s spirit lives in you?... God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves (1 Cor. 3:12-18).

On the other hand, God will also judge the unrepentant non-Christian for their sexual sins, whether heterosexual or homosexual:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified [declared righteous] in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Obviously, no matter how much illicit sex and other sin one has in one’s life, the comparatively brief pleasure experienced is hardly worth an eternity spent in hell.

There is another reason God wishes to protect the sexual relationship within

marriage—because it protects the family unit and the children who inevitably flow from that union. This is such a self-evident truth that no commentary is necessary.

But sex is holy for yet another reason; it actually mirrors what God Himself did in the incarnation. The institution of marriage was not something man invented for reasons of convenience or practicality. God is the author of marriage, and He began it the day He created woman to be a companion to man:

The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”...So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep.... Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Gen. 2:18,21-24).

We can see from this passage and others that marriage is designed by God and involves certain things. First, the woman is designed to be a helper to man, and just as obviously, the man is designed to love, nurture and protect the one that was taken from his own body (compare Eph. 5:25-30). The fact that the woman was initially taken from the man’s body and made separate from him is symbolized in a wonderful manner when a man and a woman are “reunited” and joined physically in marriage.

Second, God instructs the man and woman to leave their father and mother. This is something that can cause serious problems in a marriage relationship if those who become married do not successfully leave their parents in order to “cleave together” to begin their new relationship.

Third, a man and woman are to be united together “and they will become one flesh.” This physical uniting goes far beyond the physical dimension and also involves an emotional and “spiritual” uniting.

Indeed, marriage itself parallels what God did through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. What did God do in the incarnation and what are its results? Put simply, God Himself (Jesus Christ) left His own “family” in heaven (the Father and the Holy Spirit), came to earth and made a public declaration of His love for mankind at the cross. Because of this, when a person receives Christ, he is married to Him (in the sense that the Church is described in Scripture as the Bride of Christ), and there is unity, joy, and a new birth or new life.

This spirituality is paralleled in the marriage of a man and woman. A man and woman leave their family and come together at the marriage altar, making a public declaration of their love for each other. The man is then married to his wife, and there is unity, joy, and eventually new life.

Perhaps one reason why God treats the sexual act so seriously is because of all it implies concerning what He has accomplished in the incarnation and in His marriage relationship to the Church. Scripture itself comments on this by implication:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.... After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the Church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking *about Christ and the Church*. (Eph. 5:25-32, emphasis added)

Indeed, the *spiritual* aspects of sex and marriage are far more profound than many people realize.

Another reason God wants us to wait for sex until marriage is because He wants to protect the most important sex organ we will ever have—our mind. Those who do wait until marriage usually have better marriage relationships. This is not necessarily because the sex is any better (though there are those who argue from experience it is), but because a mutual trust has been established at the beginning of the relationship which provides a good foundation for a successful marriage.

Put another way, because sex and marriage are gifts from God, they are properly subject to His loving commands. Since God is their author, having sex in accordance with His purposes and obeying His commands about marriage should not only produce the best sex, but also the best sexual development, freedom and experience, and the best marriages.

God also wants to protect us from being unable to discern the difference between love and sex, and He wants us to have a logical basis to know whether or not we are in love with someone or whether it is primarily our hormones or emotions speaking to us. Illicit sex frequently confuses the issue.

Finally, it goes without saying that God further wants to protect us from fear and give us peace of mind in the area of sexually transmitted diseases—those who wait for sex until marriage have this peace.

In essence, the reason for the biblical teaching about sexuality is because God is the one who made sex and designed it to be enjoyed in the manner it was intended. Like anything whose proper function is abused, it either doesn't work well or causes additional problems. God wants to protect us from this, and He wants to provide the best for us in a quality mate simply because He loves us. This is why He has given us commands to obey and why we should give our children the same commands.

Dating, sex and marriage are all wonderful gifts from the Lord and those who take them seriously will find great reward. God knows how He has created us, what human nature is like, what is or isn't in our best interest. In truth, the commands God has given us are only those for our own best welfare. A God of love

would do no less (1 John 4:8).

Rejecting God's principles for sex only produces the myriad of serious problems we see about us today. Because sexual permissiveness is destructive to the created social order, it is also ultimately self-destructive. Thus, parents who have educated their children in biblical standards concerning love, marriage and sexuality—and children who have obeyed those injunctions—characteristically have fewer of the problems encountered by those who are educated in liberal attitudes toward love, marriage and sex. Obedient Christians do not have to deal with guilt, broken relationships or divorce, emotional problems, suicide, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, adultery, abortion or other problems.

The biblical view of sex may not be popular in our culture—but it is demonstrably⁵ what is best for our culture—for ourselves, our children and for our nation and its future.

Notes

¹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 125.

² "hieros gamos." Britannica Concise Encyclopedia from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. <<http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article?tocId=9367077>> [Accessed June 29, 2005].

³ http://www.free-biz.org/articles/Hieros_Gamos.

⁴ Paul Cameron, et. al., "The Longevity of Homosexuals: Before and After the AIDS Epidemic," *Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying*, Vol. 29, no. 3, 1994, p. 249.

⁵ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Myth of Safe Sex: The Tragic Consequences of Violating God's Plan* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), passim.

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