

What kind of sexual behavior is prohibited in the Bible?

Ted Wise

Email questions from time to time inquire about what the Bible says or does not say about permissible limits and boundaries for sexual expression between man and wife in marriage. The following question came in over the holidays. We have substituted "XXX" in the interest of discretion and modesty, and in order to generalize the question. I also want to encourage open and frank questions without causing those who ask them any fear of embarrassment. Ted Wise

Question: I was wandering (sic) if you have any Biblical information about XXX between husband and wife? Is it a sexual sin and what is its moral status? Does it offend Christians and God? I guess I'm asking is it right or wrong? Thank you,

FL

First let's hear from Lambert Dolphin (dolphin@best.com). Lambert writes FL:

Dear FL,

I don't know of anything off hand in the Bible that would help clarify this for you, but I am forwarding a copy to my friend Ted Wise who is very discerning and will probably have some good insights.

My initial response is that XXX is the improper use of the body and would therefore be wrong in all circumstances, including marriage. One meaning of the word "to sanctify" is "to put to the use intended by God." We ought not to violate the intended use or function of any part of the body which is the temple of God, nor violate the dignity and sanctity of another person.

Thank you for writing,

Lambert Dolphin

Now from Ted Wise:

Dear FL,

My name is Ted Wise and Lambert Dolphin forwarded your question to me about XXX in marriage and what the Bible has to say about it. I noticed that he wrote, "My initial response is that XXX is the improper use of the body and would therefore be wrong in all circumstances, including marriage". Lambert's advice is in line with accepted traditional Christian opinion, even though there is no literal "thou shall not" verse. The practice's forbidden status is common in nearly all of the world's ancient and respected religions. Basically they take a "natural" point of view which of course we recognize isn't very authoritative compared to a supernatural position.

For instance, most Eastern thought on the issue is along the lines that XXX is an improper mix of the holy and the profane or the natural and therefore clean vs. the unclean. They see some body parts and sexual behavior as the source of life and hence clean but find other parts and how they are used offensive and thus unclean. One can also find among their beliefs a multitude of prohibitions about how the mixing of certain foods in the same vessel can make the clean unclean. Similarly, orthodox Judaism prohibits some foods from being on the same plate. I think you can sense that the basic ideas are thoughtful and based on matters of health, but in practice

they deteriorate into an undue concern over the minutia of the Law that results in the observation of customs that seem odd to us.

The dietary laws of the Old Testament are a curious part of our Christian inheritance and one day I would like to study them. But one must be careful to remember that Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because of their obsession with the ceremonially clean vs the unclean. They were so captivated by the small points of the Law that they neglected mercy and forgiveness. Christians sometimes forget that the flesh loves to be religious and that we too can become overly fascinated by the Law. Most of the theology produced by these beguiled folks is in the form of convoluted legalism without much basis in reason. However, those old laws are the Word of God and hidden among them are some rather penetrating thoughts.

Let me see if I understand your questions correctly. You wrote in part:

"I was wondering if you have any Biblical information about XXX between husband and wife?"

"Wandering" FL? Freud would have made a lot out of that typographical slip. You have to more than "wonder" what the Bible has to say about a subject before the Spirit of God will open the text for you. I know that sounds like I'm saying you should surrender your objectivity before you read. I'm not saying that at all. What I'm saying is that for Christians there is more to learning than merely reading a book. It is our personal relationship with God that determines what we can understand and accept. This was true during all those years before there was a Bible and it's true now. Understanding God and being a Godly man, as I'm sure you already know, involves a lot more than reading the rules and looking for loop holes to slip your doctrine in. As our critics say, "You can support any point of view with the Bible, if you just look hard enough for it.

The most important thing for any Christian to watch for when searching the Scriptures for guidance is one's own bias. How does one know if one is reading something into a text that isn't really there? This is why it's good for us to check out our relationship with God before looking for answers in the Word. If I desire to be obedient to God before He speaks, I will definitely hear better. Sometimes, when we ask God about His will, we sound as if we were asking Him to submit his will to us for our approval, then we'll get back to Him on whether or not it's a go. Not the best approach for growing in Godliness.

The Scriptures say, "...whatever is not from faith is sin." (Rom 14:23). This passage is particularly appropriate because of that word "wonder". It reveals your doubt about this aspect of your sexuality. I suggest that you take a look at the other verses from this section of Paul's letter to the Romans. Just substitute your questions about sexuality for those that the early Roman church had about eating certain foods and you will have an answer to the rest of your questions.

"Is it a sexual sin and what is its moral status? Does it offend Christians and God? I guess I'm asking is it right or wrong?"

"I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean."

"For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men."

"So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles."

"The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin."(Rom

14:14-23)

FL, I don't know you, maybe you have the maturity and freedom in Christ to say with Paul, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable..." (1 Cor 6:12). Myself, I still have a lot of things that are not "lawful" for me to do. I know that my freedom in Christ is a completed work. I know he said from the cross that His work was done. I know that He has raised me up with Him far above all earthly power and authority and I know that He has given me his Spirit as a much better guide than the Law. I know He has set me free...But it seems that I don't believe it all the time. So because of the littleness of my faith, not all things are lawful for me. FL, I couldn't do what you are asking about in faith and I'm sorry but I don't believe you can either.

Besides, even if you do have the maturity and freedom to exercise this aspect of your sexuality, you still can't do it. A probable multitude of other "weaker" Christians would be offended. The burden is always on the stronger, freer brother. For their sakes, unless you can find something in the Word of God that says differently, you should restrain yourself.

"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED THEE FELL UPON ME."

"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus." (Rom 15:1-5)

FL, I hope you don't view us as a bunch of hung up old fudds who are trying to rob you of your liberty. I personally enjoy a great deal of liberty in Christ and I would like you to ponder these last thoughts. If you are not obsessed with this particular practice, wait it out. It's just a passing fancy. Most Christians find that Solomon's Song of Songs is a very liberating book. You have to take into account that God can not tempt anyone and as a result has quite a problem writing a book about sex that our vivid little minds won't get turned on by. Read the book with your wife and try to see things literally from Solomon and his wife's point of view. It can give you both a great deal of liberty and peace.

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