

SEXUAL SIN
Deuteronomy 22
By Raymond White

Christians are unavoidably caught in a dilemma. To talk about sex at all seems un-Christian-like and embarrassing, but to not talk about sex quits the field and cedes the game to the devil. The Latin maxim “Qui tacet consentire” means “silence implies consent” which is exactly what the devil wants to hear from us: silence.

I do not intend to offend, but I do intend to be frank. And unfortunately, where frankness travels, offense sometimes tags along. It would be easier for me to just not bother with this subject, but then what would be the point of writing about sex at all if we can’t talk frankly about sexual sin? So I’ll take the risk of maybe annoying a few readers in order to say what I think needs to be said. Also, in my defense, there this saying, “A fool takes offense when none is intended.” Keep that in mind, and we should be okay. But do be forewarned, when the Bible talks about sex, it can get pretty raunchy.

[1] CELIBACY

The Bible has a lot to say about sexual sin, so much so that we could wrongly construe that sex is itself innately sinful. So, perhaps the best place to start a conversation about sexual sin is to talk about what is *not* a sexual sin; namely, sex is not a sexual sin.

The notion that sex is innately sinful caught on in earnest in the fourth century with Saint Anthony, Christianity’s first monk. When the Roman persecutions ended, Christians wondered: well, *now* how do we prove our devotion to God, now that no one is killing us? The answer was self-sacrifice which for many meant no sex; that is, celibacy.

But celibacy was bouncing around in Christian thought even before Anthony. Women embraced it because lifelong “chastity” empowered them in the male dominated Roman culture. Roman law was very chauvinistic, particularly the notion of *Patria Patestas* (“power of a father”) which gave the male head of household absolute right over his wife and children, even the right to kill them with impunity. So that when a woman married, she was basically exchanging one male tyrant for another. Christian celibacy gave Roman women an opportunity to escape all that by simply refusing to ever marry.

In the apocryphal book “Paul and Thecla” (circa 190 A.D.), Paul proselytizes the young woman Thecla who is engaged to be married to Thamyris. Paul persuades her to remain unmarried and a virgin. Taking that advice, Thecla breaks off her engagement and remains chaste all her life.

Many early Christian women took Thecla’s chastity as the model to follow, and celibacy found itself in vogue — in my view, a great mistake whose time had come. But that’s where male chauvinism leads: to female retreat. Abuse anybody and they will leave.

By the middle ages, sex had fallen into such disfavor that women were seen as seductresses, blamed for the evils of sexuality, and were sometimes executed as witches.

Another consequence of branding sex as sinful was the priesthood’s requirement of celibacy, which became firm in 1139 at the Second Latheran Council. Unintended consequences such as pedophilia seemed not to be a concern.

Celibate priesthood continues in the Catholic church to this day, and also in the Orthodox churches, although Orthodox priests found a clever way around it: Orthodox priests marry prior

to ordination and are allowed to remain married, so that 90% of their priests are married. Good for them.

There are also a small number of married Catholic priests, perhaps about 200. Most of them were married Anglican priests who became Catholic priests and were allowed to remain married. This leaves a strange window of opportunity for any Catholic priest who wants to marry. He can leave the Catholic church, become an Anglican priest, get married, then leave the Anglican church and return to the Catholic church with his wife whom he is allowed to keep. That circuitous route seems absurd but it actually works, and it happens.

Martin Luther and other reformers were firm against celibacy. Luther wrote, “Nature never lets up, we are all driven to secret sin. To say it crudely but honestly, if it doesn’t go into a woman, it goes into your shirt.” Luther rejected celibacy doctrinally and actually — he married Katarina von Bora on June 13, 1525 at the age of 42 and they had six children.

But setting aside Christian opinions, what does the Bible say? It is time to dispel the nonsensical notion that sex is sinful and that celibacy is God’s will for us. I say nonsensical for the simple reason that without sex the human race would not be here, and that sounds pretty nonsensical to me, considering the trouble that God went through to get us here. So, to the Bible. My proof, if we need to prove the obvious, is one verse —

***Genesis 1:28** And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth ...*

Thus God’s first commandment to the newly created human race was: have sex. And God was not bashful about it — that conjugal commandment, was, in God’s words, a blessing. Therefore, sex per se cannot be sinful, unless we want to make God an accessory to sin which is even more nonsensical.

Returning to Thecla, it is unlikely that Paul ever advised Thecla or anyone else to be celibate. Why? Because in the Bible Paul gives the very opposite advice.

***1 Timothy 4:1** ...in the latter times some shall depart from the faith ... :2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy ... :3 Forbidding to marry ...*

So Paul calls those who forbid marriage apostates, liars, and hypocrites. How could he ever forbid marriage? And then there’s the fact that the apostles were married.

***1 Corinthians 9:5** Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?*

So, if sex is a sin, Peter and the rest of them didn’t get the memo. We must conclude therefore that sex per se is no sin, not by any theological stretch.

But then what about —

***1 Corinthians 7:1** ... It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

Without itemizing all that Paul said in this chapter that seems to promote celibacy, I’ll just point out that Paul also said this in that chapter —

1 Corinthians 7:6 But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.
1 Corinthians 7:25 I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment
1 Corinthians 7:26 I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress
1 Corinthians 7:40 ... and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

In no other of Paul's writings is the apostle so wishy-washy as he is here. *I think? I suppose?* Well, if *he* is unsure, should we dare use this text as a theological basis for so contestable a notion as celibacy?

And further, Paul also said this *in the same letter* —

1 Corinthians 11:11 Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man in the Lord.

That doesn't sound very celibate to me. If he was preaching celibacy, he sure backed off of it in a hurry, just four chapters later, as I said, in the same letter. Putting it all together, it's as though Paul is saying: Yes, marriage and sex and children have problems, so if you want to remain single and celibate, I give you permission to do that. However, keep in mind that marriage and sex are "in the Lord"; in other words, marriage and sex are God's will for us, problems notwithstanding.

And finally, there is this —

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled...

So, is sex a sin? Impossible.

[2] SIN IN GENERAL

But then, why all the fuss? Why is sex ever sinful? To answer that, we might answer the more basic question: why is *sin* ever sinful? Why is there such a thing as sin? And that question is best answered by Jesus —

Matthew 22:37 ... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ... :39 ... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. :40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

What God wants from us is two things: love God and love others. By loving others, I presume that God means not just kind thoughts but also kind behavior, which Jesus illustrated so well in his parable of the Good Samaritan. In other words, God is calling us to civility. Loving behavior then is what the law and commandments are about.

So, to flip this coin over, what is sin? Sin is a failure to love; meaning, of course, kind behavior, not merely kind thoughts or kind intentions. Therefore, what characterizes sin, all sin, is one thing: harm!

God's commandments are not capricious. They all have a single, sensible intent: to make life better for everyone. There are no commandments that do not target that.

John 10:10 ... *I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

So, how does sexual sin fit into this? Sex is not sinful, but it becomes sinful for the same reason that any sin becomes sinful; namely, when it harms rather than blesses. And where so intimate an act as sex is concerned with all its repercussions, harm is always lurking in the shadows.

Let's now proceed to the Bible's list of sexual sins. I expect we'll see at every turn that sex is sinful when and only when it is harmful.

That the Bible even provides such a list shows that sex itself is not sinful. If sex were innately sinful, the seventh commandment would not be "Thou shalt not commit adultery" but "Thou shalt not have sex." The Bible says no such thing, thank God!

So then, what does the Bible say?

[3] ADULTERY

At the top of God's don't do list is adultery, the one sexual sin that appears in the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:14 *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

It's impossible to assess the damage that adultery causes. Besides the immediate damage (divorce, murder, suicide, life-long sadness) there are ripple consequences much like the radiating waves of a splashing stone.

I'll keep the statistics to a minimum, but here's a reality check: About 70% of infidelities result in divorce. And rippling from that, the harm divorce does to children is far greater than divorcing parents are usually willing to believe.

In the book "The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, A 25 Year Landmark Study" by Judith Wallerstein, the author shows that children are greatly harmed by divorce. They are more aggressive towards parents and peers, have more learning difficulties, are three times more likely to need psychological help, become sexually active earlier, more likely to have children out of wedlock, and are three times more likely to divorce or not marry.

If adulterers gave even a passing thought of consequence of their behavior to children, they might more often walk away from the temptation to cheat. The problem is that selfishness doesn't give a damn about other people's happiness.

There is this saying (and I don't know where I got it from): "What you took benefited you little but cost me everything." No wonder God's penalty for adultery was stoning. That's what such contempt for other people's happiness deserves.

Deuteronomy 22:22 *If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then shall both of them die...:23* *If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; :24* *Then ye shall ...stone them with stones that they die;*

That doesn't mean we should stone people today, of course not. Jesus forgave the woman taken in adultery and that sets a new example for us. But he first found her guilty of a death worthy sin, *then* he forgave her.

Notice that it does not matter which was the married person, the man or the woman or both. To violate a marriage, one's own or someone else's, was a capital crime, in God's opinion. Grace and forgiveness do not change that.

Of course that doesn't prevent adultery from happening, not even in Israel.

Jeremiah 5:7 ...they committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses :8 They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife.

Ezekiel 18:6 ...defiled his neighbour's wife...:11 ...defiled his neighbour's wife...

Ezekiel 33:26 ...ye defile every one his neighbour's wife: and shall ye possess the land?

There may be some sins that make God angrier than adultery but not many.

[4] FORNICATION

So, adultery is sinful. But is fornication sinful? Assuming that no adultery is involved, nobody's marriage is damaged, is sex between consenting unmarried adults sinful? Let's see.

Ezekiel 16:23 And it came to pass after all thy wickedness, (woe, woe unto thee! saith the LORD GOD;) :24 That thou hast also built unto thee an eminent place, and hast made thee an high place in every street. :25 Thou hast built thy high place at every head of the way and hast made thy beauty to be abhorred, and hast opened thy feet [spread your legs] to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms. :26 Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians thy neighbours, great of flesh; and hast increased thy whoredoms, to provoke me to anger.

They not only were sexually wicked, but they established public places, eminent places, to do it. So their social attitudes about sex were wrong. These eminent places gave their sexual misconduct a sort of celebrity status which promoted even more sexual sin. Sort of like groupies wanting sex with rock stars, and rock stars taking full advantage of their eminent status.

But is that sinful? Well, if it provokes God to anger, and it does, then it is sinful. And why would it provoke God to anger? Because it falls short of the greater happiness that God has in mind for us, a lifetime of love for ourselves and our children that comes from a lifelong commitment we call marriage.

The Hebrew word *chattath* and Greek word *hamartia*, both of which we translate to sin, are archery words and mean "to miss the mark." That's what sin is, falling short of the best good; in other words, missing the target.

Fornication is not a victimless crime. Children born out of wedlock are collateral damage. Bad things happen to children whose parents are not married, so that even when adultery is not involved, sex without marriage is a bad idea.

Fornication does have a penalty, not death as does adultery, but still, something severe — or so some would think.

Deuteronomy 22:28 *If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.*

The penalty for sex between unmarried, unattached people is not death but marriage. And not just marriage, but marriage without the possibility of divorce. Guys, take note. That's the penalty for seducing a girl. You take her, you keep her.

But what if *she* seduces *him*? Well, then she's achieved her goal. So boys, beware.

And what if a boy and girl want to get married but her father says no? So the kids plot together to force her father to allow the marriage. They're thinking, "Ahah! If we have sex then her dad will *have* to let us get married." Not so. There is this —

Exodus 22:16 *And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. :17* *If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowery of virgin.*

In other words, dad cannot be cornered to giving his daughter to a boy he doesn't like. But if the young couple tries that shenanigan, the boy still has to pay the dowery but he doesn't get the girl. That's a deterrent.

Here is some really practical advice about the machinations of seduction —

Proverbs 2:16 *To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words.*

Proverbs 7:21 *With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.*

It is not necessarily the lure of sex or a woman's beauty that draws the man in, but often it is the flattery of her words. She makes him feel good about himself. His ego is the bait.

That's powerful. Married women should remember that, and married men too. Words matter. It is said that our most powerful sex organ is the one between our ears.

Okay, so now we have a single girl who is not a virgin. Can she ever get married? Yes, she can, but there is a caveat. There are reasons why people want to marry virgins. Of course every young person wants to enjoy the loveliness of being their partner's first love, but more than that there is the matter of trustworthiness.

The never-asked question (which should be asked) is: "You say you'll be faithful to me, but why should I believe that?" And the best, most trustworthy, never-said answer is: "I have saved myself for you this far, that is my best evidence that I will continue to save myself for you for the rest of our lives." That is believable.

That is what fornication loses. A person who indulges his or her sexual whims before marriage is more likely, *much* more likely, to continue indulging their sexual whims during

marriage with whomever and whenever he or she likes. People don't change just because they get married. They either have sexual integrity or they do not.

Yes, there is repentance. And yes, sometimes repentance changes lives. But sometimes it doesn't. I remember Roger and JoAnn, from decades ago. They were a happily married, church going couple in spite of the fact that before she got religion, JoAnn had been a hell's angel moll. But things were going well for them until one day, they weren't. Roger came to church alone and announced that JoAnn had left. She decided she didn't like religion after all and returned to the hell's angels.

Every marriage is risky. (In America, half of all marriages end in divorce which is ironic since almost all our movies end with boy and girl fall in love and live happily ever after.) But some marriages are riskier than others. Clearly, every person who is about to get married has a right to know just what they are getting into so that they can make decisions based on factual knowledge. Roger knew his risk going in, and it could have turned out well. It didn't, but it could have. But at least he knew.

A person's sexual history is like a resume. It is common sense that what you'll be in the future is likely to be what you've been in the past. Not always, but often enough. Some people change, others don't.

And this leads us back to that caveat I mentioned, that caveat is *disclosure*. It's a simple enough idea: before I commit my life to you, I want to know just who you are.

Well, fair enough. And in God's law that disclosure is critically important; that is, if the young woman wants to live!

Fornication is not itself a capital crime. But it becomes a capital crime when a girl who is not a virgin gets married without disclosing that she is not a virgin. That is a really big no-no. She can get married but she must disclose.

Deuteronomy 22:20 ... if this thing be true [that the bride is not a virgin] ... :21 the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die ...

Ouch! "Oh, I'm sorry, sweetie. Did I forget to mention that I once ...?" Sorry, but honeymoon night is too late to disclose. Sexual history must be discussed before the wedding, so that both of you can go into married life with eyes wide open and accepting of the truth. How can you possibly claim to love someone that you are willing to lie to at the outset? If deceit is the pattern at the beginning of a marriage, it is likely to continue into and throughout the marriage. A marriage based on lies is likely doomed, and it is so unfair because the innocent person had no idea what he or she was getting into and is left asking: "What happened?"

At the top of this section about fornication I wrote that "nobody's marriage is damaged." But that's not strictly true, is it? It's the future marriage that is damaged, and maybe irreparably. It's bad to have to say to the one you claim to love, "Sorry, but I gave to someone else what I should be giving to you."

Here's a better plan, young people: Wait!

But what if you didn't wait, and now wish you had? Now you're in love, want to get married to a special someone, and you face a devil's decision: fess up and risk losing that special someone, or keep your sexual past a secret. What should you do?

There are plenty of people who will advise you either way. I wouldn't dare give such advice in either direction. I just told you what God's law demands, now you do with that what your conscience demands — or allows.

If you keep the secret, no one will stone you — we're long past that brutality — but you face maybe a lifetime of guilt and wonder if you've been forgiven.

And what if your secret does come out by some twist of bad luck? There may be hell to pay so you are always vigilant and a bit fearful — fearful for yourself, but also fearful for your spouse who would be deeply hurt by the truth, and maybe even more fearful for your children, because the fallout anger could result in divorce, or at least a house full of bitterness which will dismay and confuse the children. They will not understand why mommy and daddy no longer love each other.

So, maybe you are thinking you'd really like to get it out into the open, get forgiveness, and get past it. How do you do that?

Again, I am not giving advice (I wouldn't dare), this is just a thought. Assuming that you decide to disclose and take the risk, how might you handle it?

One thing you don't need to do is to bear all the details. Suppose your intended does walk, and suppose your intended (now ex-intended) has a big mouth and for spite tells the world what you said in confidence. Then you have another problem.

So how can you disclose without disclosing *too* much? Maybe like this —

“Sweetheart, I love you, and I believe you when you say you love me. And if we get married, I will try my very best to make you happy (and I think I can), and I know that you would make me perfectly happy. I would love for us to spend our lives together. But before you make that final decision about me, you should know something more about me. I'm a different person now than I was five years ago. I went through a phase where I was very angry. I was angry with my parents and the world and I behaved in self-destructive ways. I'm not going to say much about those bad times which I'm trying to forget. But imagine the worst, and then ask yourself, would you still want to marry me? If yes, I will be thrilled to marry you and we will be the happiest family in the world. If no, you won't need to say anything. Your silence tomorrow and next week and next month will be all I need to hear. It will hurt me to lose you, but building our marriage on a deception would hurt me more. And a lifetime of guilt, I couldn't bear it. So I've told you that much now, and am giving you time to think about what I just said. Now you can decide if there will be an *us* in your future.”

What have you accomplished with this discrete disclosure? You have disclosed without disclosing. You have indicated that you wish to marry this person, but you've hinted at a checkered past, and you have given that person a chance to opt out if he or she chooses. And if that person walks, at least you've disclosed no dirt about yourself that your ex-intended can pass on. If you are asked for specifics, you can say, “You think about this much, then we'll talk.” How your intended reacts to this after a week or so will likely tell you everything you need to know. If the outcome is favorable, you might also say something like, “By the way, if there is a burden in *your* past that you'd like not have to carry by yourself, I'm in a *very* forgiving mood right now.”

Be warned: honesty has risks. You could lose. That's why integrity takes courage.

Or you can lie and keep your secret. But if you go that route, just remember that about the cruelest thing you can do is build a happy family, *then*, because you are driven by compelling guilt and an urge to clear your conscience, you unburden yourself by dumping that burden on your spouse. That is not a loving thing to do.

What should one do in that case? I have no idea. Except I know one thing that one must *not* do: one must never, under any circumstance, even consider ending one's own life. The cruelest most heartless thing a person can possibly do to their family is to burden them with that

guilt. Better is to confess and lose everything, or take a secret to the grave. Either way, at least there is hope. But if a person abandons their family by their own violent hand, there is no hope. And perhaps one of them may follow that lead. *Any* alternative is better than that. And besides, how would one face God then? Sexual sin and cover up lies and injuring disclosures, Jesus can cover all of that. Suicide, not so likely.

[5] HOMOSEXUALITY

Homosexuality is the conjugal act of male with male or female with female. But it's also a few other things, and the Bible has something to say about some of them.

Deuteronomy 22:5 *The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.*

Not only does the Bible forbid the homosexual act, but also the pretense; that is, cross-dressing — men dressing as women, and women dressing as men. The Bible instructs that men's and women's apparel be distinct. Of course those distinctions vary from culture to culture and change from time to time, but whatever they are, they should be taken seriously.

Deuteronomy 23:1 *He that is wounded in the stones [testicles] or hath his privy member [penis] cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord.*

A man who has used surgery to remove his genitalia to convince himself that he is a woman, he will be denied fellowship in the church. Today we call this transgendered.

And now to the real issue of homosexuality: the act of sodomy. Homosexuality is strictly forbidden in the Bible, both in the Old and the New Testaments.

Deuteronomy 23:17 *There shall be no...sodomite of the sons of Israel.*

It is interesting that God's law forbids male homosexuality but not female homosexuality. Queen Victoria did a similar thing. When laws were presented by Parliament to her prohibiting male and female homosexuality, she approved the male prohibition but not the female. Her reasoning was that she simply did not believe there was such a thing as female homosexuality, so why should it be forbidden.

Maybe God was wearing the same blinders, or maybe he was sensitive to the fact that male homosexuals risk a variety of sexually transmitted diseases that females do not. Or maybe female homosexuality is implied just as when God created "man" he obviously meant woman as well. In any case, there it is and your guess is as good as mine.

1 Kings 14:24 *And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.*

From Moses to Solomon, God still calls homosexuality an abomination.

1 Kings 15:11 And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father. :12 And he took away the sodomites out of the land.

This king “took away” the homosexuals and God considered that a good thing. What “took away” means is not clear. Did he kill them? Did he expatriate them? Did he herd them into concentration camps? Whatever he did, it was severe.

1 Kings 22:46 And the remnant of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father Asa, [Jehoshaphat] took out of the land.

2 Kings 23:7 And [Josiah] brake down the houses of the sodomites.

Romans 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: :26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: :27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

That last verse is the only place in the Bible that I know of where God complains about female homosexuality.

1 Timothy 1:10 ...for them that defile themselves with mankind...

Just what is God’s problem with homosexuality? It is indeed a sin, but we no longer consider it a crime. Today, we have a healthy regard for the separation of church and state and that’s a good thing. If God wants to punish homosexuals, he can do that, as he did at Sodom and Gomorrah. But it is not our business to do that, unless someone is carrying a deadly disease such as AIDS and is transmitting that disease to others. Then that is a crime, and that is where the law must step in.

In any case, in the Bible, homosexuality is a sin. The question is, why?

An easy answer is that sexually transmitted diseases certainly do harm people.

But STDs are transmitted heterosexually too, so why does God particularly frown on homosexuality? Yes, STDs are transmitted heterosexually as well as homosexually, but male homosexual contact is the greater risk. And besides, God doesn’t like fornication either so that’s no argument. The best defense against STD transmission is marriage: one man, one woman. Then you’re safe.

But there is another reason perhaps why God is adamant against homosexuality. It is why he created sex in the first place, which is to —

Genesis 1:28 ... multiply, and replenish the earth ...

Homosexuality certainly fails to do that, and that then is likely God’s complaint against it.

One does wonder though if God is pleased with our success at keeping that first commandment. We certainly have multiplied rather well. Does eight billion satisfy what God

had in mind? Maybe once we start populating other planets, the human population will jump to a hundred billion. Maybe we're just getting started.

But *multiply* is not just a global commandment, but an individual commandment as well. What God has in mind is: if *you* want the ultimate good, then *you* must procreate. I'm giving this world to you and to *your* progeny. So if you are not procreating, then you are missing out on the highest good. That seems to be what makes God upset. His complaint is not "look what you've done to me" but "look what you've done to yourself."

This would be like a father getting angry with his child who is too lazy to get good grades. But doesn't the kid have a choice? After all, it is his life. Yes, but the parent has an interest in that life, namely love. And when kids squander their opportunities, that makes parents go crazy. That, I'd wager, is what gets God riled up about homosexuality.

But, now, in the interest of civility and democracy, let's consider the claim that homosexuals make about themselves; namely, that they are born to it, that they are a male in a female body or a female in a male body, and that their sexual preference is not a choice but a reality forced on them by nature.

Is that even possible? And if it is, what is our Christian duty in dealing with homosexuals? Accepting that it is a sin (because the Bible says so), but is rightly no longer a crime (separation of church and state), why should people be punished for behaviors that have no victims?

(I must hasten to add that our new found permissiveness must not be stretched to allow rape or pedophilia or harm in any form to innocent people. In other words, as society grants new liberties, society is duty bound to insure that those new liberties do not create new innocent victims.)

We Christians have claimed that men are men and women are women because that's the way God wants it and we have no business changing it. And I certainly understand that, but there is a limit to that argument, which is this: There are conspicuous flaws in God's creation, things that turn out not quite as God had planned.

Now I feel my fellow Christians getting hostile and accusing me of heresy. But I defend by pointing out some obvious realities; like for instance: there are conjoined twins, there are hermaphrodite (dual gendered) babies, there are neuter babies, blind babies, deaf babies, blind and deaf babies, and so on. Do Christians really mean to say that all that suffering is God's will? That conjoined twins was what God wanted for them, and we ought not to meddle by separating them when we can? Well, Jesus did a lot of meddling — he healed everyone of everything. So obviously, a man blind from birth was not God's will for him and Jesus said so (***John 9:1-3***). So shouldn't Christians at least allow that in this wonderful world that God has created, something things go terribly wrong?

Let's face it. As omnipotent as God is, he does not get all of what he wants. ***1 Timothy 2:4*** *Who will have all men to be saved*, is a nice sentiment, but sorry, it isn't going to happen even though God wants it so very much. Honestly, would any Christian having a conversation with conjoined twins say, "This is what God wants for you"? Or wouldn't we rather say, "Let's see if surgeons can separate you" and risk correcting "God's creation"?

Okay, now that I've settled that (I think I have), let's ask again the question: is it possible for a male to be in a female body or a female to be in a male body, despite nature's good intention?

I'll offer just one possibility: All fetuses are conceived female. But some (approximately half) become male because of an altered chromosome. Then the mechanics happen. What makes

the males male is a bath of testosterone. It changes the genitalia *and also the brain*. When the brain is bathed in testosterone, it becomes a male brain. Without that bath, the brain remains female and there is a difference. The two hemispheres of the female brain are equal in size. But for the male brain, the left side is slightly larger, and the right side slightly smaller.

Here's what I'm postulating. Suppose that testosterone bath does only half its job? Suppose it alters the genitalia but not the brain or vice-versa? If so, a person really could be born with a male body but a female brain or vice-versa, and what homosexuals have been saying about themselves and their situation may be right.

Do I know this to be true? No, of course not. I'm not a doctor, certainly not a researcher, and I've read no studies that claim such a thing. I'm only saying, maybe. I'm also saying, if it *is* true, that would change a lot of our opinions, wouldn't it?

Now, a little science fiction. Assuming that the above is true, what if science someday is able to create avatar bodies for us? Would not a homosexual benefit by receiving an opposite-gendered body, a body that, in every way, matches their mind? Wouldn't that be better than trans-gendered surgery?

In any case, whatever the reason, it's time to learn to live together in harmony. But, as I already said, we must not be so permissive that we allow real harm, real evil to innocent people, to become legal.

Also, to be truly fair, laws should not prohibit dissent. If homosexuals want to marry, so be it. But then, in the interest of true democracy and already established guaranteed rights—(like freedom of religion and the right to assemble which necessarily implies the right to assemble *exclusively*; in other words, us and not them, or the right to assemble means nothing) — Christians and others should not be forced by law to participate. If one's livelihood is taking wedding pictures, or making wedding cakes, or the like, and one feels like not providing services to homosexuals, the law ought not to be interfering with people's personal choices, particularly religious choices. The government has no compelling interest to interfere in such things.

Maybe homosexuals do have the right to marry. Fine. America is about freedom. But they have no right to prevent others from dissenting. Rights granted to any subset of a society must be balanced by equal rights granted to people of the opposite view. If not, then government, rather than establishing freedom, is merely choosing sides — granting freedom to one side while denying it to the other, which is not what government, our government anyway, is supposed to be about.

[6] BESTIALITY

Exodus 22:19. Whosoever lieth with a beast shall be put to death.

Leviticus 20:15 And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast. :16 And if a woman approaches unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast ...

Sex with an animal is a capital crime.

Now some may wonder, but isn't this just another victimless crime? Well, maybe, if you suppose AIDS to be a victimless disease. But AIDS is far from victimless, and it came from just this aberrant sexual behavior. HIV is now scientifically confirmed to have come from wild chimpanzees in Cameroon.

Just how do you suppose that transference from them to us happened? Exactly. And that is why God forbids it. Maybe there are other reasons too, but isn't that enough? People are dying by the millions, and children too, because someone, or someones, had an out-of-control sexual desire of the stupid kind and acted on it.

[7] MASTERBATION

Well, that was an unsavory subject. Here is another. Is masturbation a sin? Catholics say it is. Does the Bible agree? I'm not so sure that the Bible is clear on this one. Here is a whole list of verses that are sometimes used to make that case. Do you think they make the case or not? I don't know. You decide.

Romans 1:24 dishonor their own bodies between themselves :27 men with men

Romans 6:12 Let not sin ... reign in your mortal bodies...in the lusts thereof

Romans 13:14 make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof

Galatians 5:16 ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Ephesians 5:3 all uncleanness, or covetousness :4 neither filthiness

1 Corinthians 6:19 your body is the temple

2 Corinthians 7:1 cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit

1 Thessalonians 4:5 lust of concupiscence

2 Timothy 2:22 flee also youthful lusts

1 Peter 1:16 Be ye holy, for I am holy 2:11 abstain from fleshly lusts

What sexual activities are "lust of the flesh" and "uncleanness" and "filthiness" etc. alluding to? Certainly the authors had in mind adultery, fornication, and anything else that the Bible expressly forbids, but the Bible nowhere (that I know of) expressly forbids (or even discusses) masturbation, so do we just assume it's a sin or not?

Why the authors didn't talk about it is unclear. Maybe they were too embarrassed. But that doesn't make sense because they weren't embarrassed to talk frankly about homosexuality, bestiality, and incest; and those are more problematic than masturbation.

Or maybe they thought we'd assume it is a sin from the euphemisms. But euphemisms often cause readers to get a message wrong. I do wish at times that the Bible would set aside its euphemisms and just make its point. "Men with men" is certainly clear — it's homosexuality. But is uncleanness and covetousness clear? Uncleanness is not clear at all. Maybe Paul had something specific in mind or maybe he didn't. Now covetousness at least we can untangle a bit.

The tenth commandment says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife," which is hot on the heels of the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." The two together are saying that if you shouldn't have her then you should also not want her.

In the ten commandments, we also find another such pairing: the eighth commandment "Thou shalt not steal" is followed (again) by the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet...anything that is thy neighbor's."

So it is not a big leap to infer a more general principle that what you shouldn't have, you also shouldn't want. That is the spirit of the tenth commandment, and from it we can infer something about masturbation. Whether the act itself is sinful or not (and the Bible doesn't say), it is often (maybe even usually) associated with wanting someone that is forbidden. And that wanting, or coveting, is a violation of the tenth commandment.

Here is the Lord's take on this in the Sermon on the Mount —

Matthew 5:28 *whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. :48 Be ye therefore perfect ...*

Yes, it is true that lust sometimes causes one's heart to yearn for adultery. And yes, Jesus' call to perfection demands that we eliminate even that. So that's the ideal.

But I would ask Jesus this: Is adultery with one's heart as sinful or as hurtful as adultery with one's penis? And his answer I believe would be: no, of course not. Just as wishing someone dead is entirely different than pulling a trigger and actually killing him. Even with our evil desires, God certainly gives us credit for restraint. That's why we have so many commandments that say, "Don't!" Which means don't do it, even though you want to. If evil desires are as serious as evil deeds, then the commandment "don't" would be pointless.

What? Execute us for every evil thought? Think the wrong thought and you go to prison, or hell? We should be hounded by the thought police? That would be absurd.

Even Jesus faced evil thoughts — Satan tempted him with three. Jesus considered each of them in turn at least long enough to understand them so that he could reject them. We say that Jesus is perfect, but he had three evil thoughts. Does that make him not perfect? He is perfect in the way he lived his life and in the way that he handled those evil thoughts. So evil thoughts are not in themselves sinful, it's what we do with them.

But then, at what point does a thought becomes a sin? That is unclear. Does a thought become a sin when it becomes a premeditated intent to do evil, or something before that? Well now it's getting silly, isn't it? This evil thought is a sin but that evil thought is not. And the other evil thought over there is somewhere in between.

My suggestion is: Just be aware that an evil thought can be sinful if it grips you. So as thoughts pass in and out of your mind, let go of the evil ones quickly. That is as close to perfection, I think, as what Jesus had in mind. But I could be wrong.

Perfection is an unreachable ideal. Like grabbing a snowflake, the instant you have it, it's gone. Even the thought, "Ahah! I'm perfect now," is sinful, so just how do you ever expect to achieve perfection? Perfection is what God would like from us, but does he seriously expect to get it. Not hardly. That's why he prepared the atonement. Grace covers a lot, even things that seem like they might be sinful but we're not quite sure. Things like, oh I don't know, like maybe masturbation.

Yes, Jesus called us to perfection. But he also knew there wasn't a snowball's chance in hell that would happen. So Jesus sucked up his disappointment and went to his cross to save us anyway. He covered our sins and also all those gray area things (like my using the word hell in this paragraph) that we're not sure about.

But then it's tempting to say: well, if it *might* be wrong then don't do it, just to be safe. But that itself becomes a sin because then we're creating laws out of thin air, and the Torah expressly forbids doing that.

Deuteronomy 4:2 *Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you...*

When we start creating commandments to forbid things that *might* be wrong we're playing God which is its own dangerous game that leads us into inquisition thinking and to some very bad sins indeed.

Here's a real world for instance: If you're a cashier at a supermarket and you're checking out groceries, and a bottle of Jack Daniel's rolls past you, would you say, "I'm sorry, but my Christian faith will not permit me to sell that to you"? You'd probably be fired on the spot and rightly so. This kind of hair splitting leads to serious nonsense. That's the kind of thing Jesus may have had in mind when he said —

John 13:1 he...loved his own which were in the world

John 15:19 ye are not of the world.

Jesus accepts that we must be *in* the world, but he asks us to not be *of* the world. Basically this is blanket permission to get on with life and not get so hung up on minutia that we're afraid to breath because anything *might* be a sin. That is why Christians reject law as the means to salvation — no one can live up to the law's demands if we allow all its detailed implications.

Acts 15:12 which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.

But now back to the question that you're hoping I'll answer: Is masturbation a sin? My answer is, how would I know? The Bible doesn't say so one way or the other. With all of the above, we *still* don't know if God is angered by masturbation. And it is glaringly absent from verses such as this —

Leviticus 18:22 Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind :23 Neither shalt thou lie with any beast :24 Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things ...

This verse is interesting because of what it does *not* say. This verse condemns homosexuality and bestiality, so it seems that if God condemns masturbation, this would have been a good place to say so. But there is no mention.

There is, though, this one verse —

Deuteronomy 23:10 If there be among you any man, that is not clean by reason of uncleanness that chanceth him by night, then shall he go abroad out of the camp :11 when evening cometh on, he shall wash himself with water: and when the sun is down come into the camp again.

All this is saying is if a man has a wet dream and makes a mess (spontaneous emission), he is to go out of the camp, clean yourself up, and come back. There is uncleanness, but that is a different thing than sin.

Or maybe this is not a wet dream, but is in fact masturbation. What does *chanceth him by night* mean? Is he asleep or awake or either? And that I don't know. But whatever it is, it's not a crime, not a sin, it's just a mess and needs to be dealt with — in private.

Here's a verse that might help —

Matthew 5:30 if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off

But it doesn't help, does it? Does anyone take this literally? It is hyperbole, of course. Jesus is making the point that if something tempts you irresistibly, then don't be near it. For instance, a recovering alcoholic should not go to parties where alcohol is served. Further, there is nothing special about a person's right hand that would make us suppose that cutting it off would correct either bad thinking or bad behavior. But separating oneself from tempting things does correct bad behavior anyway, which is what this verse is about. If you can't control your thoughts at least control your behavior. Keep yourself away from situations where your bad thoughts might become bad behavior.

And still we have found nothing in the Bible that is definitive about masturbation, only condemnations of lustful thoughts which might likely accompany masturbation.

Is there anything in the Bible at all, anywhere, that discusses this subject in earnest? Well, maybe, in one place only. It is the story of Tamar, a young widow who wanted to get pregnant by her husband's brother, which she had a legal right to do since her husband was dead. But her brother-in-law was not as willing as he ought to have been, and so —

Genesis 38:9 And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. :10 And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also.

It's not clear that Onan avoided getting Tamar pregnant by masturbating or by withdrawing. Either way, the birth control was the sin — that he was unwilling to get his sister-in-law pregnant. And that leaves the uncomfortable question unanswered: is masturbation a sin? The only answer we can take from this story is that if it is done to avoid impregnation then *that's* the sin.

That leads to an opposite question: What if a man masturbates *for the purpose* of getting his wife pregnant? You might think that's absurd, but it's not absurd at all. It happens in fertility clinics every day around the world. Married couples go to such clinics because they can't get pregnant and want to. They are responding to God's prime directive: multiply. They are obeying, just as Tamar finally did by using a devious method to trick her father-in-law into getting her pregnant.

Bizarre question: If God was upset with Onan for not getting his sister-in-law pregnant (upset enough to kill him), how did God feel about Judah who actually did get his daughter-in-law pregnant? Was that a good thing or a bad thing? Moving on —

And then there is erectile dysfunction. Suppose a man in his old age is just not capable of spontaneous physical arousal. Should he and she just give up? That doesn't seem very obedient to "multiply." Fortunately there's Viagra. But even that may need a little dextral stimulation. Would that be a sin? Remember that Abraham was a 100 years old when he finally got Sarah pregnant.

Hebrews 11:12 Therefore sprang there even as one, and him as good as dead ...

Which means at a hundred, he could not — well, a doctor today would call it ED. But Abraham managed. How? Who knows. The Bible doesn't say. Maybe having a young wife (Hagar) on the side helped.

What is a sin anyway? There are two ways to know what a sin is: if God said no, and if it harms. And even that second, if it harms, is not absolute. For instance, it may be a sin to cut a man open, but not if the intention is to remove a cancer tumor. So harm is relative and needs a context. Maybe we need to be a bit fluid in our thinking. Jesus reduced it all to two things: love our God and love our neighbor. It really is that simple.

I'm not giving you permission to engage in some sordid sexual activity, I'm just telling you what the Bible says and *doesn't* say. Now you follow your conscience.

[8] PORNOGRAPHY

In the Bible there is a big void about that last subject, masturbation. That is not true about pornography however. It is fair to ask, is pornography a sin? Since there is no physical contact between two people, why would God care one way or another that we look at each other's naked bodies? After all, doctors do it all the time, and we don't think that a sin. My answer is, as always, there is sin if there is harm. So, is there harm?

Let's consider again the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:28 *whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. :48 Be ye therefore perfect ...*

Certainly there is difference between lusting for adultery and actual adultery. But there is also a difference between lusting and mere wanting. Wanting, we can't help. We want what we want. That itself is no sin because it is simply nature's tyranny.

To want a woman who is off limits is similar to alcoholism. There is no such thing as an ex-alcoholic, so says AA, all of whose members identify themselves as *recovering* alcoholics, not *ex*-alcoholics. In other words, they never consider themselves *cured*. At best their constant desire for alcohol is under control, but it is never cured.

But under control is good enough. After all, avoiding some evil thing is what really matters. If we don't *do* it, that counts, regardless of our compulsion. It is the taking of the forbidden that is the real sin, because it is the taking that causes the harm.

But lusting seems to be a middle ground: halfway between wanting and taking. We may be strong enough (or cowardly enough) to not take what is forbidden, but we substitute something else, a private sin (if it is a sin) we call lusting where we stop resisting the want and start taking pleasure in it and feeding it.

That leaves us with a perplexing question: Is lusting for something we never take a sin? And specifically, in that *Matthew* verse above, although adultery is certainly a sin, is adultery *in the heart* a sin?

Jesus doesn't say so. He says that lusting after a woman is adultery in the heart, but he declines to tell us if adultery *in the heart* is a sin. If it is, then he has just condemned the whole human race and insisted on the impossible, for without that primal urge of sexual desire, the human race would have long ago been extinct.

What if you are a single guy and the girl you are lusting for accepts your marriage proposal? And certainly that is the norm. Is Jesus condemning *that*? That's what he says. Lust, any lust, is adultery in the heart.

Let's be honest and admit the obvious: a guy proposes marriage because he wants the girl in his bed. That he also wants a lifetime commitment and children and a host of other good things is beside the point — he first and foremost wants sex.

He doesn't want to say it so crassly so he uses the more gentlemanly words, "will you marry me?" What he's really asking for is sex, and she knows it. When she accepts his proposal with a "yes," it is because she is similarly minded — she wants sex too, and the conditions, the package deal, are acceptable.

If that's not "lust," then what is it? And without that reciprocating lust, their honeymoon will be pointless (pun intended) because lust is what gives a man his physical capacity to get an erection so that he, they, can engage in sex and, as God demanded, "multiply."

Does Jesus really mean *that* is adultery in the heart? That is literally what he is saying, and that is absurd.

I'm not trying to trap Jesus in his words, I'm just trying to allow him to use exaggeration to make a point. And his point is, I believe, that sin is lurking in everything we do, even nominal things such as enjoying a pretty face. Then he locks it up by saying, *be ye therefore perfect*, which he knew was unachievable.

Therefore his overarching message was and is: I can save you anyway, in spite of flaws that lurk in your very nature and even in your most well-intended behaviors.

That Jesus was exaggerating is inescapable, and I will prove it from his own words. Let's change the subject for a moment from sex to anger management.

Matthew 5:21 *Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. :22* *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

If you call a man a fool, you're going to hell? Well, no, but you are in *danger* of going to hell. In other words, that anger may lead to something worse. Mere name calling cannot itself be condemning because Jesus also said —

Matthew 7:6 *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine ...*

Matthew 23:27 *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

If name calling is a sin then Jesus is a sinner, unless we make a silly argument that that it's okay to call a man a dog or a pig or a whited sepulcher, but not a fool.

On the one hand Jesus warns us about name calling, which is a point well made, but then on the other hand he himself engages in some well deserved name calling. So it can't be the name calling that is the sin but what it might lead to.

And that drives us right back to the question: what about lust? Is it sin or not? And I repeat my answer: if it harms, it is sin, otherwise, it is not.

If lust drives a man to propose marriage, that is not sin, that isn't even adultery in the heart even though Jesus equated the two (lust=adultery). Obviously he was exaggerating.

Now to the point: Is his statement about lust an argument against pornography? Well, yes. But it is also his argument against *everything* we do, everything we lust after, because in everything there is at least the potential for sin.

So, because it is *so* broad — his call to perfection — one wonders where the actual lines are drawn, if there are lines. Probably there are, but they are fuzzy lines.

Did pornography even exist back then? It may have. The second commandment is a bit strange.

Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

God had already made his point in the first commandment, *thou shall have no other gods before me*. Then why this fixation on images?

It is likely that there was an understood intent for images, *all* images, and that intent was idolatry.

Later, statues were mere art. Still later, paintings and photography and computer images were seen as mere art, and not objects to be worshipped. But in those earliest times, the age of Moses and prior, it may be that statues were *all* intended for one thing: worship, all having something of life in them. Even today, in some cultures if you take a man's picture he may try to kill you thinking that somehow you've captured his soul.

Idol worship was always false religion and always a pretext to misbehave with God's approval — God wants us to have an orgy, and any babies that result that we don't want, God says we can sacrifice. That's the lunacy that comes from stone gods.

That is the only explanation I can think of that makes sense of the second commandment — why God would forbid images, all images. So it's not the images that are evil, it's what we do with them. If it is the images themselves that are evil, then iconoclasts are right, and all of our art and movies and computers are evil. Does that even make sense?

To show the silliness of that iconoclast extreme, in iconoclast societies, when they want to image a human in a book, to avoid violating the second commandment, they replace the human head with something else, like a bird's head, persuading themselves that since it's not a person, they are not violating the second commandment.

But that's stupid because the second commandment forbids *all* images, any likeness at all of anything in the air, on the earth, or in the water. God is not talking about images of people but images at all. So the iconoclasts achieve nothing with their distortions.

Is God requiring us to believe that we should have no images at all? That's impossible because God also told Moses to make a brazen serpent and also two cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant. Then later, when Solomon built the temple, he filled it with all kinds of images, of bulls and more. And God accepted that image filled temple.

So it's not the images that are sinful, but something about the images, and that can only be their use as objects of worship, and as pornography — many idols are, after all, naked females. And I'd wager that images of naked females were used in ancient times for much the same purpose as image of naked females in magazines and on computers are used today.

So, to answer my question, was there pornography in ancient times, I answer, probably. That's what many "images" were, and God had a grievance against it (the second commandment) almost from the beginning.

But why? What was all the fuss about? So what if a guy looks at a picture or a statue of a naked girl and gets turned on by it?

To get a handle on this, let's return to the original point, which is: sin is sinful because it harms, and for no other reason. So if God calls some behavior sinful, it must also be harmful.

So, what is harmful about a statue or a picture of a naked girl? Because it distracts us from the real thing.

Romans 1:25 *Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator ...*

Okay, but why is that so bad? Because it doesn't work. If you are looking for salvation, you will not get it from an image but only from the real God. If you are looking for sexual happiness, again, you will not find it from an image but only from a real partner. Images are counterfeit.

Also, false priests tend to give bad advice, like for instance that it's okay to have sex orgies, and it's okay to kill unwanted babies. That's idolatry, and it is evil.

Pornography is like that, it substitutes for real happiness — I mean real *sexual* happiness with a real spouse. Now it's time to jar you a bit with this —

Proverbs 5:18 *Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. :19 Let her be as the living hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. :20 And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?*

God wants you and your spouse to be *ravished* with each other, and *ravished* is something that just does not happen with a pornographic image of any kind.

Question: Just what exactly does "fountain" mean? Clarke's Commentary says, "anatomical allusions must not be pressed into detail in a commentary on Scripture." To which I reply, why not? Just what "detail" does Clarke not want pressed? "Fountain" is an allusion, but to what? And do I dare risk saying it? Yes, I'll risk pressing the allusion into detail because it's important to understand. In the context — and the context is love making — "fountain" is most likely a euphemism for genitalia. And "fountain" means precisely that in another verse —

Leviticus 20:18 *... he hath discovered her fountain, and she hath uncovered the fountain of her blood ...*

The text (**Proverbs 5:18**) then is saying: let your male genitalia be a blessing. In other words, have sex with your wife and enjoy it. Hey, I didn't write it, it's in the Bible!

So sex in marriage is not sin, not harmful, but is in fact a blessing.

So, what *is* harmful? What is harmful is getting distracted from that, becoming focused on someone or something that is other than your real sexual partner that God intends to remain with you for a lifetime or an eternity.

And the harm in this distraction is real, for men in particular. How so? A woman can always engage in sex, a man cannot. In modern medical vocabulary, the problem is called erectile dysfunction which has long been the bane of older men. It has now become the bane of younger men as well because of pornography.

Porn creep is a recent addition to our vocabulary. It refers to this unintended consequence of pornography: that it disables a man's ability to get or sustain an erection.

Another word, one that's been around longer, is "jaded." It means to lose enthusiasm for something because of having too much of it. Pornography's damage comes from too much of it, instant gratification, and therefore constant satiation. So, ironically, the lust is lost because it is too often and too easily satisfied.

Not to contradict Jesus, but we need our lust, and we are killing it by pointing it in the wrong direction. Our idolatry has run amok. Pornography destroys the joy of sex for both men and women by disabling erections. It's that simple.

Young men, be warned. Pornography will destroy your sexual happiness. You can focus your sexual urges on a real woman or on pixels, but the two are mutually exclusive. They are in competition with each other for your attention. God offers you a real woman, the devil offers you pixels. You must decide.

A brief word about nudism: If ever there was a self-destructive behavior, speaking sexually I mean, nudism has to be the dumbest thing a man can be involved with. Think about it. A man steps into an environment of naked females and has to condition himself mentally to *not* get an erection. He is intentionally imposing erectile dysfunction on himself so he can mingle without embarrassment. How dumb is that?

Men, be warned. Pornography is not a victimless crime. *You* are the victim. It is just as sure as if you were an alcoholic, a smoker, a heroin addict, or a compulsive gambler. Every such compulsive behavior brings a short term gratification but with a long term cost.

By the way, did Jesus avoid such places? After all, he was accused of associating with sinners because he attended their parties. But would he ever have gone to a strip joint to proselytize or heal someone? There is this one verse —

Matthew 16:13 *When came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked...*

It's easy to confuse Caesarea Philippi with Caesarea. They are two different towns with similar names. Caesarea was on the coast, Caesarea Philippi was inland, above the Sea of Galilee, and not on any coast.

But they why does the verse say "coasts"? That's a bad translation and would be better rendered as "suburbs." In other words, Jesus went there but he never went into the town. As for instance, one might go to Las Vegas but never visit the strip.

And why did Jesus not go into town? Because Caesarea Philippi was a party town. It had strip clubs and brothels, and people looking for sexual entertainment would go there. Jesus did not. He was in the area on a sabbatical leave of sorts with his disciples, but he never got further than the suburbs. There are places he would not visit. Maybe we should take a lesson from that.

Now, in addition to pornography harming *you*, does it harm anyone else? Of course it does. The harm is rampant. There is harm to the women whose lives are diminished and destroyed by their participation, to families that are broken, to children who are raped or seduced into early sexual activities that scar them through their entire lives. And of course there is AIDS

and other STDs. That industry would have the public believe that they do it safely, with frequent medical exams. They are lying. Multiple partners is never “safe.”

But an observer might defend himself: I’m not participating in all that, I’m just an outside observer. And that brings us to this question: Is the observer committing sin by merely observing? Let’s consider that.

To begin, let’s state the obvious: The porn industry and all the injury it causes wouldn’t exist if there was no audience. So observers are, at best, enabling accomplices to evil. Do you want to be an accomplice to evil, to actions that harm others?

Paul says it this way —

Romans 1:32 *Who...not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.*

Paul is grumbling about vicarious sin, getting your jollies not from your own bad behavior but from somebody else’s.

It’s a bit like watching a gladiator contest, watching men kill each other, cheering them on, then claiming to be innocent — “Hey, *I* didn’t kill anyone. I was just watching.”

Just watching? Does that make the audience guiltless? How can that be when the reason gladiators are compelled to kill each other is for the entertainment of the watchers. Without the watchers, the killing would stop.

Just so with pornography. Vicarious sin is sin indeed, and the watchers cannot escape culpability for they are the enablers of such rampant evils. It is their demands that cause it to happen.

Jesus’ choice of words may have been a bit extreme — *whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart* — but he was onto something. This is not capricious, there is real harm in wanting (and wanting to want) that which is forbidden. And his call to perfection is spot on. Though an impossible goal, it should be our goal. It will enable us to escape a lot of evil and do a lot less harm.

C.S. Lewis wrote the Screwtape Letters. In one of the letters, #9, the senior devil Screwtape gives this advice to a junior devil Wormwood: “An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it is better style. To get the man’s soul and give him nothing in return - that is what really gladden’s our father’s (Satan’s) heart.”

There is no more apt description of pornography than that, to sell your soul for nothing in return. That’s pornography.

As an addendum, here is a list of verses that are often used as a case against pornography. There are no absolute prohibitions against pornography (there was no photography in those days) but the general warnings are clear enough.

Job 31:1 *I have made a covenant with mine eyes, how could I gaze at a virgin?*

Job 31:7 *If...my heart has gone after my eyes...let me sow and another eat...*

Psalms 101:3 *I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless*

Psalms 119:37 *Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things ...*

Proverbs 6:25 *Do not desire her beauty in your heart ...*

Habakkuk 2:15 *... you make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness.*

Matthew 6:22 *...if your eye is bad, your whole body will be filled with darkness.*

Romans 13:13 *Let us walk properly ... not in sexual immorality and sensuality*

1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality :19 ... your body is a temple ...
Galatians 6:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident ... sensuality
1 Thessalonians 4:3 control his own body ... not in the passion of lust ...
1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world...the lust of the eyes...is not from God

[9] INCEST

Leviticus 18:6 None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness ... :7 The nakedness of thy father, or the nakedness of thy mother, shalt thou not uncover ... :9 The nakedness of thy sister ... thou shalt not uncover. :10 The nakedness of thy son's daughter, or of thy daughter's daughter, even their nakedness thou shalt not uncover. :12 Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy father's sister ... :13 ... [or] thy mother's sister.

Leviticus 20:17 And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she his nakedness; it is a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people: he hath uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity. :19 Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy mother's sister [aunt], nor thy father's sister; for he uncovereth his near kin: they shall bear their iniquity.

Deuteronomy 27:22 Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother

Deuteronomy 22:30 A man shall not take his father's wife, nor discover his father's skirt

Ezekiel 22:11 And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife; and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter in law; and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter.

Amos 2:7 ...and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name.

Incest is strictly forbidden, and also anything that is like it, like for example, a man's step-mother or sister-in-law were off limits even though that would not be biological incest. But such unions would be so very like incest that, were they allowed, they'd invite actual biological incest, so God paints this with a broad brush.

Why does the law prohibit incest? Because incest produces birth defects, and birth defects harm children. Of all God's prohibitions, this one makes the most sense.

But even here we run into moral conundrums. Here's one: Abraham married his sister Sarai (well, half-sister, but still) and that biological closeness increased the odds of having a defected child. Children born of brother-sister incest have about an 8% higher risk of birth defects. Does that justify legal prohibition? That's for you to perplex over.

Also consider that Moses, the author of all this, was himself a product of incest.

Exodus 6:20 And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses ...

Is that important? Probably not, but maybe. It might incline us to defend the unborn. After all, it would have been a shame to have lost Moses to an abortion.

To make it even more perplexing, consider that there are other groups — for instance, women over 40, or women who smoke or use alcohol or illegal drugs — that are at higher risk of producing defected offspring. Are we morally obligated to outlaw such unions? That's called eugenics — deciding who is and is not allowed to have children, forcing less preferred people to be sterilized. This was one of the great evils of Nazism.

Consider too that there is such a thing as accidental incest. A man and woman meet, fall in love, get married, and have healthy children. Then, because they were both adopted, they finally get around to doing some research and discover that they are in fact brother and sister separated at birth. Horrors! I'm not being frivolous, this happens. And sometime such a marriage results in a horribly deformed child.

So, now what? Is the law obligated to require them to divorce? You decide. And be grateful that you're not the presiding judge in such a case. At the very least, adoption facilities should be required to inform separated siblings that they have siblings. I think.

[10] PROSTITUTION

Deuteronomy 23:17 There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel.

Prostitution was strictly forbidden by God's law.

Deuteronomy 23:18 Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore ... into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow.

The money that a prostitute would earn cannot be contributed to the church.

Proverbs 23:27 For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit.:28 She also lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men.

“Deep ditch” and “narrow pit” probably mean a grave. In other words, sex with whores can kill you. And it certainly can. Not just AIDS, but syphilis too can end your life. Famous victims of syphilis are King Henry the VIII, Hernando Cortez, and Al Capone. Rank and wealth are no defense from venereal disease.

But, to give the devil his due, let's not forget Rahab —

Joshua 2:1 ... And they [Israelite spies] went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

This harlot saved the lives of the spies, became a hero of Israel, married well, and became an ancestor to David the King and Jesus Christ. I'm not condoning harlotry, I'm just telling you what the Bible says. Make of it what you will.

And then there were these two harlots —

1 Kings 3:16 Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king [Solomon] and stood before him.

This is the story of two women and their two babies. One baby died and these women came to Solomon, each claiming to be the living baby's mother. One was the real mother, the other was lying, and to discover the truth, Solomon used a clever trick.

None of that is my point. My point is that we forget that these ladies were harlots. We see here that even harlots deserve justice, to have their day in court. And Solomon, in his judgment says nothing about their professions. It's not an issue. The baby is the issue.

Further, there is no talk about executing these women for their sin of prostitution which the law, literally taken, would demand.

And finally, Solomon gives the baby to his rightful mother. There is no talk of child protective services, or taking her baby from her because she is a harlot. So even Solomon, this wisest of kings, has set aside some of the most absurd demands of the law.

[11] RAPE

Deuteronomy 22:25 But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die: :26 But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death; for as when a man riseth against his neighbor, and slayeth him, even so is this matter. :27 For he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her.

God's law clearly recognizes the difference between the criminal and the victim and doesn't haggle with stupid stuff like was she enticing him, or wearing seductive clothes, or leading him on, or whatever. A rape is a rape. If the girl says no, he must stop. And the idea that a rape victim should be punished — as sometimes happens in Islam — is exactly the opposite of God's law which says, *unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing*.

[12] PEDOPHILIA

Matthew 18:2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them. :6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Jesus was not always about love and forgiveness, he had a temper and sometimes showed it. Here his temper rages against people who harm children, child abusers. That he was usually kind to so many people who might not deserve it, warns that the rare times that he *was* angry, he really meant it. Abusing children then is a dangerous thing to do.

[13] MARRIAGE

Is marriage ever sinful? That question likely surprised you, and my answer may surprise you as well, which is: sometimes.

How? When? Well, let's apply the same litmus test that I've been applying all along and ask: is marriage ever harmful? Because if marriage is at times harmful, then yes, it would also at times be sinful.

So, can marriage ever be harmful? Yes. Certainly a marriage is harmful if it is without the bride's (or groom's) consent. Arranged marriages — where the woman is forced by some means (threats, starvation, intimidation, family alienation) to marry a man she does not want to marry — is little different than rape, except that it's legal.

I read a story of a Muslim girl who rejected her family's plans for her marriage and instead ran off with her lover. But her brothers caught up with them and they killed her by burying her alive. And that they call an "honor killing."

And then there's Tuptim in any version of "Anna and the King of Siam" that you care to believe. Tuptim was beheaded (or burned at the stake in the Rex Harrison version) for daring to not want to be in the king's harem. But Mongkut was the king after all, so poor Tuptim had no choice but to submit to legalized rape — that, or die.

And then there's coverture. From medieval times, coverture denied every married woman legal status apart from her husband. And when she got married, all property she owned became the property of her husband. And when he died, all his property became the property of some male heir, leaving the wife and daughters utterly dependent on the kindness of that male heir. And if that male heir was not kind, then the women had to marry well in spite of their own disinclination or be destitute. More legal rape. Many women stuck in that dilemma had to become unwilling prostitutes to survive.

Of course divorce was out of the question. It did not matter what just cause a woman might have against her husband. He might be a violent thug who beats her with a fire poker every time he gets drunk. Or maybe he has contracted syphilis from his multiple whores. None of that mattered. If she leaves, she starves, it's as simple as that. He owned everything, she owned nothing, Coverture laws made sure of that.

Coverture had withstood every legal challenge for a thousand years. In England, coverture ended only in the twentieth century — pretty late for so enlightened and democratic a country as England.

Yes, I know. You are shocked that all of a sudden I'm sounding like a feminist. Well, I am. We need to discuss what marriage *is* versus what it *should be*.

Let's accept an obvious fact: Women are disadvantaged. First, because of her slighter frame. In a combat situation, unless a woman has superior martial arts skills or a gun, a woman will always lose to a man, and that makes woman constantly vulnerable to rape, murder, and other male viciousness. And second, by the very nature of female sexuality, it is women who must bear the burden of pregnancy, labor, delivery, and child nurturing, all at personal cost to herself. Marriage is *supposed* to equalize that.

I'm not saying marriage isn't worth it, of course it's worth it — reproducing is our primal urge. Without children, we feel incomplete, which is nature's way of insuring our continuance. But let's accept that woman are disadvantaged and deal with that. A medieval rabbi once prayed, "God, I thank thee that I am not a slave, a gentile, or a woman." Some philosopher once wrote, "Just being a woman is a fearful thing."

So, now, armed with that rash of honesty, let's again ask: what is marriage? Or what is marriage *supposed* to be?

Continuing with our honesty, let's accept the obvious however distasteful it may be. Marriage is a negotiated contract. He offers something and she offers something. And if both are satisfied with the exchange of promises, they get married.

What does the man want? He wants sex, and children; that is, *his* children. He wants assurance that the children he will raise are his, and he can only be confident about that by trusting her fidelity. That's why love matters. Love is not just what completes our happiness, although it is that (and why shouldn't we be happy), it is that which keeps us faithful. So fidelity, above all, is what men need from their partners to assure them that they have children; that is, their own children.

What else do men want? A variety of things — some of it reasonable, some very unreasonable. When a man asks, "Will you marry me?" he may or may not also have in mind, "Will you clean my house, fix my meals, wash the dishes, change the diapers, et cetera?" What is reasonable or unreasonable is up to each couple.

Now, what does a woman want? *First*: she wants to be a mother, otherwise, the whole notion of marriage would be pointless. *Second*: she wants a safe nest for her children and for herself. But *third*: she wants fairness. Every woman knows or at least senses that women are disadvantaged from the outset, and instinctively seeks a marriage that will equalize and unburden some of that disadvantage by transferring it to the shoulders of a willing husband who *wants* to be fair and seems to have a knack for it.

Gordon B. Hinckley, a Mormon prophet, once said to young men at a General Conference, "The girl you marry will take an awful chance on you." That, in my view, was the most prophetic thing he ever said. For it is *she* who gives up far more to the marriage than *he* ever does.

For the *he*, marriage is in stride. He has two needs: love fulfillment and life fulfillment, and those two run parallel, pacing each other in perfect harmony. One of the things that attracts her to him is his career, or at least his career expectation. She *wants* an alpha-male, a man with real power. That's part of his sexual attraction. And she does not see his successes as in any way in competition with her own aspirations. So his career aspirations and his family aspirations are not in conflict but are in parallel.

But for the *she*, the two are in conflict. Marriage is disruptive. She has the same two needs: love fulfillment and life fulfillment, but for her, those two often run perpendicular, at cross purposes, in competition with each other. No man has ever yet fallen in love with a woman *because* she has a good career (unless he's a gigolo). For a man, her career is a non-issue. Or if it is an issue, it is an issue in the wrong direction. At best, an enlightened male is ambivalent, at worst an unenlightened male *doesn't* want her to have a career and is adamant. For men, an alpha-female is a beautiful woman, not a successful woman. And thus she must decide how much of her personal aspirations she is willing to set aside for her family, and that tension sows the seeds of family discord.

I hasten to add that none of this is sexism. All of this is nature. Men are not *trying* to be pigs, it's just that men want what men want because it's inbred, and women want what women want because it's inbred. And to better see just how un-sexist all this is, understand that boys learn to be masculine (get a career) because girls demand it of them and train them (by selective rejection) at an early age. And girls learn to be feminine (make yourself pretty) because boys demand it of them and train them (by selective rejection) at an early age. So that either gender has only itself to blame when they disapprove of the opposite gender's demands. Each has trained the other by asserting its own preferences. No one is to be faulted, it just is what it is.

So, how do we deal with these gender imbalances? First, let's set aside the name calling and stop blaming the other gender for our woes, and accept that the differences are what nature has imposed on us. Then let's see what we can do about it and be fair.

But haven't we just settled it? After all, if it's nature's doing, shouldn't we just accept it and keep women in their place? No. Nature also imposes cancer on us but that doesn't mean we should let cancer have its way with us. We are sentient beings, and God gave us *dominion* and with it permission to bend nature to our liking. And high on our like-list is fairness. Yes, there are gender imbalances. But in our search for fairness, we must find ways and compromises that mitigate those imbalances so that women are treated fairly. And what man who claims to be "in love" would not want that?

That brings us right back to the question: What is marriage, or what *should* it be? What marriage too often is, is a way for men to double down on female disadvantage. A woman gets married expecting to mitigate her disadvantage. She doesn't want to raise her children alone and impoverished. What she is hoping to get from her husband is love, support, and a sharing of the inescapable duties of children rearing. But what she too often gets is abuse, so that her disadvantage not only is not mitigated, it is intensified. When that happens, that makes marriage sin, and justifies divorce (read my article on divorce). I'm sorry, but it does, and the feminists are right.

So, what is to be done? Dissolve marriage? That's where the feminists are wrong. Because marriage, for all its failings, is still a woman's best shot at equality. Marriage, when it works right, really does transfer much of the burden and cost of child rearing to someone else's shoulders and shares the cost of just living.

So, how do we get a marriage to work right? Early communication is paramount. When a man asks a woman to marry him, her answer should be, "maybe." The next thing out of her mouth should be: "Tell me what you think marriage means, so that I can decide if I want to be the other half of your marriage." Then the next thing out of *his* mouth should be something like: "You know, you're right. I need to know what your life expectations are so that I can help you achieve what you want, just like I hope you will help me achieve what I want."

That, then, is the beginning of frank discussions that are the foundation of honesty that can carry through a lifetime of monogamous marriage and love.

They may discover that they are so conflicted that they ought not to get married. We might be tempted to call one right and the other wrong. That's too narrow. Better is to just accept that they are different and should both walk away and seek other partners.

Or they may discover conflicts that are manageable, if they are willing to manage them. But such conversations will unavoidably focus down on her aspirations for career *and* family. He needs to know what she expects and hopes will happen, and she needs to know if he intends to help her as she intends to help him.

And of course, they need to realistically plan for the well being of their children who have a stake in all this but, being not yet born, have no say in their decision making.

The issue is not what is right and wrong, or even what is proper behavior for married people. The issue is: do they *agree* on what is right and wrong for *them*? And if she is to compromise everything and he nothing, then that's a bad sign.

But not to be completely one-sided, many marriages fail because *she* won't contribute *anything*. There are lazy women just as there are lazy men. Some women see coverture (if they knew and understood the word) as a formula for easy living. "Hey, my man's job is to take care of me, so why should I have to do anything at all? You want a hotdog? Cook it yourself!" Well,

guess what ladies, and gentlemen, coverture is dead and gone. What marriage today is expected to be and should be, and in fact should always have been, is fairness: fairness in household chores, in child rearing duties, in life goals, in financial contributions and access to money, and, of course, sex — basically in all things.

But let's not go crazy with this. What is fairness? Fairness is what the couple thinks it is and not what society thinks it ought to be. Institutions — governments and churches and social movements — have insatiable passions for interfering with families trying to dictate the institution's own ideas of fairness. A feminist once got in a huff with me because I unwisely mentioned that my wife cooked all our meals. That I washed all dishes, dried them, and put them away, did not sway this feminist — to her, I was a pig because my wife cooked and I didn't. Nor did it sway her that had I cooked any meal, my wife and I surely would have died from ptomaine poisoning. To that feminist I say, butt out! *My* marriage is none of *your* business.

The bottom line is: don't let anyone else tell you what is and isn't fair, and certainly not me. *You* decide. But decide *before* you are married, or at least have some good idea so that you will both be happy about every aspect about your marriage. Then maybe it will survive. And that is, after all, what you want — isn't it?

[14] ABORTION

Okay, what subjects have we covered so far, and what do they have in common? Let's take a quick overview: Adultery hurts children because it destroys their loving homes, fornication causes children to be born without loving parents, homosexuality dispenses with children altogether, incest causes children to be born with birth defects, and rape causes children to be born unwanted. So, aside from all their other ills, what do all sexual sins have in common? They all harm children.

So I've covered the ground and am done, right? Not quite. Because there is one crime against children that excels in its evil above all the rest, and that is: killing them. It seems inconceivable that anybody would ever kill a child, but people do. Over a million a year in America alone. Why? Because sometimes children are inconvenient.

Ancient people (as modern peoples) love to have their sex orgies. The problem is that sometimes unwanted children happen. So, what was to be done about unwanted children? Well, kill them, of course. The problem with that, however, was conscience. It felt wrong. So, how did they deal with conscience? Easy. They built their child killing into their religious systems so that could kill their children with impunity because God told them to do it. It was, after all, a "sacrifice" that God insisted on.

But then finally God, the true God, put an end to that nonsense (Isaac was saved by a ram in the thicket) and that's what much of the Hebrew Bible is about, God's hatred of child killing.

What about today? Do we still kill our children and do we still use a religious pretext to excuse it? Yes and yes. We do kill our children. It's called abortion. And we still use a religious-like pretext to excuse our consciences. It's called a women's right to "choose." How politically lovely. Murder, then, is cloaked in the virtue of freedom, and abortion has become the ultimate sexual sin, the final injury that is done to children.

The excuse is: but if it is killed before it is born then it is not really killing a person. That argument is ludicrous because nothing happens at the moment of birth that magically transforms a non-person into a person. All that happens at birth is that the person in the womb comes out of the womb.

But let's set aside biology and philosophy and consider instead, what does the Bible (or more specifically, The Law) say about life in the womb? Does the law ever protect unborn life? Answer: It does.

Following on the heels of —

Exodus 20:13 Thou shalt not kill.

— comes this further directive: *Who shall we not kill?*

Exodus 21:22 If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. :23 And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life.

If a pregnant woman gets tangled up in a brawl between two men, and the unborn baby dies, then a capital crime has occurred and somebody is going to pay for that crime with his life. Clearly, God has in mind that unborn life has the same value and deserves the same legal protection as born life.

Roe v. Wade really needs to be overturned. A Peter, Paul, and Mary song declares: "Too many people have died." A Doctor Seuss poem says, "A person's a person no matter how small." And then there is Albert Switzer's dictum, "reverence for life." But best, I believe, is our own Declaration of Independence which demands that among our "unalienable rights" is, first and foremost, "life," which we violate every time a baby dies in an abortion clinic. That is what our society needs: a healthy dose of reverence for life — that, and a new conscience.

[15] EPILOG

To wrap it all up, let's move away from specific sexual sins and talk about punishment in general. Yes, Jesus forgave the woman taken in adultery. And yes, Tamar had her twin babies. And yes, Rahab the prostitute became a good Jewish mother in Israel. So God must be very lenient, and sex sin is no big deal.

That would be a mistake. It's best not to press one's luck. God has a mean temper, and if he's in a bad mood when he has to consider *your* sins, well, you might not be so lucky. Remember, sin is sin because it has harmful consequences. You might get lucky and scoot out from under those consequences, or you might not. Rolling dice with God is a foolish game.

When my children were little, I always gave fair warning before administering corporal punishment. Before raising my hand for some corporal punishment, I always said, "1-2-3" so that they knew what was about to happen and when it would happen. That put them in charge of their fate. I always counted to 3. Always, that is, except one time when my daughter was sticking needle-nosed pliers into a socket. That was so dangerous that something more drastic than my customary "1-2-3" was warranted. So I stood, walked across the floor to her, and said "Three!" Then I swatted her little behind.

She cried, "No fair, no fair," and she was right. But fairness be damned, I was not about to risk her life in the name of fairness.

God is like that. He too is fickle. Just remember that he is his own man, he does what he wants, when he wants, and he may or may not take your advice about anything, particularly forgiveness. He may or may not.

If you choose to roll the dice with God, who am I to tell you what to do or not to do with your life. I'm nobody you should pay attention to. Do what you want. But if you get AIDS, or get pregnant, or get shot by a jealous husband, or go to prison, or to hell, then it's on you, and no amount of crying "no fair" is going to ease the consequences.

Someone said, "It's easy to repent of smoking; it's much harder to repent of lung cancer." That's the kind of thing this essay has been about. Maybe you can repent, but *maybe you can't*. So why not just avoid the sin in the first place?

Sin has consequences. There are no sins that do not have consequences. That's the point. That's why sin is sin.

I'll end with a few judgment verses and this thought: God has the right to punish, God has the ability to punish, and God does punish. Doesn't that scare you?

Jeremiah 29:22 *And all them shall be taken up a curse...:23* *Because they have committed villainy in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives...I know, and am a witness, saith the Lord.*

1 Corinthians 6:9 *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind.*

Galatians 5:19 *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, :21 ...and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Ephesians 5:5 *For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person...hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

I know, there are many Christians, Lutherans and Evangelicals and others, who believe that once they are saved that they can never be unsaved. Grace is like super-glue.

Maybe they're right, maybe not. But if you believe that and are maybe thinking of doing some sin because your security has you covered, pay attention to Paul's warnings. He is the great teacher of grace, and he, more than anyone, must understand its limits.

Remember too that Jesus declined to jump off the pinnacle. And why was that? Because jumping would have been plain stupid. Yet that's how many of us live our lives: doing stupid things, jumping off pinnacles, hoping God will catch us.

If you are determined to trust God's grace, go ahead, jump. But isn't it smarter to trust God's warning? If God says a thing is a sin, stay away from it. Isn't that safer?