

Finally, when should sex instruction start? There is considerable discussion about this, but my own feeling is that fore-warned is fore-armed. A prurient interest in sex is a universal characteristic, and at a very early age children will learn about sex, whatever their parents may wish. For that reason I am in favour of parents answering questions as they arise, encouraging their children to ask them about the things that bother them, thus giving an opportunity to put them in their right context. You can't just talk about the facts of life, as you can about servicing a car. Sex is inextricably bound up with moral and spiritual attitudes and we separate it at our peril. Conversely we separate spiritual things from the rest of life with the same risk.

PETER WEBB

3: Premarital intercourse

It is almost impossible to examine interpersonal sexual relationships without preconceived ideas clouding our minds. But such consideration is important since there are a number of factors in contemporary society which are indicative of a rapid change in sexual behaviour. Firstly there is the advent of women's lib, which has for one of its goals the 'liberation' of women socially and sexually. Secondly there are improved contraceptive measures which are freely available. Thirdly there is a greater awareness of and sympathy for the sexual deviant. Fourthly there is a greater openness and willingness to discuss sexual matters previously rarely discussed even between husband and wife and almost certainly not in the church situation. Within this climate of change and re-examination of attitudes it is thus doubly important to base our ideas and actions firmly on Scripture: too often in the past other arguments have been put forward to enforce ideas about relationships between the sexes. One such was the unwanted pregnancy or fear of pregnancy. A number of well-meaning christian pastors used this as a back up argument with such force that it became the main argument against premarital sexual intercourse. Now that contraceptive advice and help is free for the most part and abortion more easily obtainable legally this argument loses most of its force. Thus I believe a stand needs to be taken on clear scriptural principles.

From the outset of Genesis the Bible views the sexual relationship as naturally occurring and not necessarily associated with sin or guilt. Gen. 1: 27f. states that God created male and female, blessed them and exhorted them to "be fruitful and multiply". Later, v. 31,

God saw everything that He had made "and behold it was very good". A clear statement of the Divine creation and approval of the sexual act. Throughout the Old Testament sexual relationships, as other relationships, are openly described. There is no attempt to conceal. The Old Testament adopts an essential naturalistic approval. The Israelite man was allowed a leave of one year from military duty following his marriage in order that it be established. It was the clear duty of a man to produce offspring, through whom God's plans could be fulfilled. If a man died childless it became the duty of his brother to raise up with the widow seed for his brother's line to be continued (Deut. 25: 5 ff.). In some ways it would seem that the O.T. Israelite had more opportunity for sexual freedom, yet throughout the Pentateuch there are rules for sexual activity clearly laid down. In broad principle sexual relationships were allowed within the bond of marriage and for the procreation of children. The O.T. thunders its disapproval of sexual acts which contravene a holy God's statutes. Passages like Lev. 19: 1-5 should be considered in order to obtain an overall balanced view—"be ye holy, as I am holy."

The New Testament broadly contains the words of Jesus and Paul with respect to sexual relationships. Before considering passages in particular the broad principles on which Jesus taught should be borne in mind. Firstly, Jesus was concerned, in the Sermon on the Mount particularly, with the motive behind the action. This is also illustrated elsewhere by His parable of the two men praying in the temple (Luke 18) or the account of the widow's mite (Luke 21). He criticised the Pharisees openly and fiercely for being "whited sepulchres, outwardly clean but within full of dead men's bones". (Matt. 23: 27) Jesus's view of man was that he should be an integrated whole in which good deeds sprung forth from a good heart. Secondly He dealt with people as individuals, not rigidly. The woman taken in adultery (John 8) portrays this clearly since Jesus forgave her sin but did not condemn her. Jesus considered the law as of secondary importance to man. "The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath". Thirdly, Jesus preached the central theme of the law of love. "You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemies. But I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". (Matt. 5: 43). His parting words to His disciples in the upper room contained the exhortation that "you love one another even as I have loved you". (John 15: 12). Matt. 5 and Matt. 19 make it clear that Jesus's standards were higher than those of His day and higher than the law. But yet for all that there is an understanding of human frailty (Matt. 19: 11).

Paul, much misunderstood, believed the second coming of Christ to be imminent. He made it clear that spiritual matters were the primary and important consideration, and that personal re-

relationships should take second place (1 Cor. 7: 32-35) "I say this . . . to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord". But immediately (v. 36) he goes on to state that sexual relationships were not sinful. Far from being the "prude" non-Christians consider him to be, Paul was essentially modern in his view of the married state. He encourages husband and wife to fulfil their conjugal rights (1 Cor. 7: 5). He encourages women to be active within the relationship (1 Cor. 7: 3 f.).

Thus the Bible takes an open natural view of sex as being part of life, in which an individual may fulfil or transgress God's will as in any other. Immorality, fornication and adultery are clearly viewed as evil (1 Cor. 5: 6 f.). What however of the unmarried betrothal relationship, the relationship between two people deeply in love with each other and intending to marry? Paul obviously had this in mind when he wrote 1 Cor. 7: 36. The clear implication is that the situation is out of control emotionally. Paul's advice was that they should marry in order that wrong should not be committed. This passage aside there is no other advice given about this specific relationship; the question is often asked, how far should they go? The words of Jesus in Matt. 19 suggest a clear pattern, leaving father and mother, cleaving unto a wife and becoming one flesh. In other words the marriage vows are confirmed by the sexual act. Paul uses the same quotation from Genesis 2: 24 when considering the illicit union with a temple prostitute (1 Cor. 6: 16). Paul goes further by saying that such action constitutes a sin against the Spirit since our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Scripturally this sexual intercourse outside of marriage is unlawful. But what of the natural foreplay leading to intercourse described as 'groping' or 'petting', what 'rules' apply to this situation? The relationship of two people deeply in love, intending to marry is a delicate one which develops slowly or quickly according to personality differences or situation needs. I believe the ground rules should be the general principles mentioned before taken within the context of the sexual act occurring within the marriage bond. Thus sex should be open, natural and not the subject of shame or guilt. There is no evil intrinsically associated with sexual desire, it is part of God's gift to us for the procreation of children and our enjoyment. (Gen. 1). However if we adopt Jesus's view of man when we consider our partner, we will view them as an integrated whole, we will love them with an overwhelming benevolence which seeks no personal reward (Agape). If we considered another as highly as this would we indulge our sexual desires using their bodies for our gratification? Would we start off a chain of God-given physiological mechanisms only to cut short just before its natural end, knowing that this may make sexual enjoyment and fulfilment later, in the marriage situation, more difficult? Patterns of behaviour established during the courting relationship may persist

on into marriage with unhealthy results. On the other hand are we to abstain from all sexual enjoyment before marriage refusing a gentle embrace or other gesture as a means of expressing love and affection? Between these two extremes lies the path that most tread. The exact pattern of behaviour for an engaged couple is a personal decision. They should be encouraged to openly discuss the problem recognising their own sexual needs and desires, but should each consider the other's highest good, and each other as integrated wholes not consisting of a sexual part which can be exploited for satisfaction and a non-sexual part for church activities. Let them recognise and acknowledge their physical relationships to be secondary in importance compared with their relationship with Christ, who is the pioneer and perfection of our faith, and who for the joy that was before Him endured the cross, in order that He might bring us to Himself. (Heb. 12: 1 f.).

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4: The Christian attitude to the single life

In the purpose of God a married life is the norm for men and women. The principle is vividly set out in the second chapter of Genesis but Jesus taught his disciples that the norm would not always be operative. Some will be born incapable of such bi-sexual relationships (presumably for either physiological or psychological reasons); others will be made incapable by men; yet a third category will deliberately choose the single life 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19: 12). Since both men and women are made in the image of God (Gen. 1: 27), a single life need not spell incompleteness. Indeed the earthly life of Jesus, the 'express image' of God (Heb. 1: 3), ought to put paid to any such suggestion. The apostle Paul goes so far as to say that both the married and the single life are 'special gifts' from God (1 Cor. 7: 7). The word he uses is *charisma*, the same as that employed to describe spiritual gifts within the church. That surely suggests a pattern of divine dispensation by the Spirit to be accepted as readily and gladly as the Lord's distribution to his servants of every other gift.

This is the proper starting-point for a Christian attitude to the single life. It is neither superior to the married life, as one Christian tradition has long implied, nor is it inferior. The essential thing is to discover God's special gift for one and to accept it happily and