

# What's Wrong with Sex Before Marriage

## Questions People Ask About The Christian Faith

When David McChesney asked if I'd preach on this topic, I nearly choked. My wife did choke. Why? Because this is a very personal and controversial topic. Right?

So why are we talking about it?! Because one of the most common questions non-believers ask about Christianity is "*Why do Christians have a problem with sex before marriage?*" Said another way, a good answer stands in the way of many people giving their lives to Jesus. So that makes it worth talking about.

But that doesn't mean you are all looking forward to this!

- Some of you will be wondering why we have tied this to a youth service. Well, it's because the average age of the first sexual encounter is 16. That's the AVERAGE age. Which means it starts even earlier for some.
- Some of you may be heartbroken because you have been single for a long time or are no longer married and this sermon feels like a painful reminder of that. I believe you can glorify God in this area.
- Some of you are Christians who've made the decision to stay pure in this area and want to know if it's really worth it. I will tell you "yes".
- Some of you Christians are nervous because you are not married but ARE sleeping with your partner. You're scared I'll publically embarrass you and tell you to stop. Well, I will tell you to stop. But I won't embarrass you. ☺
- Some of you aren't Christians and think we're just mad! You have no issue with sex before marriage. Candidly, if I was in your shoes, I'd think the same way. I hope tonight you get an understanding for why we think the way we do, and get a glimpse of the breath-taking God behind that.
- And some of you would be uncomfortable with *any* sermon about sex, no matter the angle I took. To you I'd say "hang in there". This'll be a God thing.

In the Sydney Morning Herald this week, there was an online article on this very topic. A regular blog was asking for people's opinions on sex before marriage. It got lots of comments and I read every one until my eyes hurt. Nearly all were whole-heartedly in favour of it. In fact, I came to realise just how "normal" sex before marriage has become. In dating relationship these days sex is not just a possibility, but an expectation. So when we Christians say we'd rather wait, it sounds as odd as if we were saying no to French toast or dinners out. Forget Men are from Mars and women from Venus. Christians seem to be from Pluto. But I was also struck by how "me-focused" sex had become. Nearly every comment showed that it was about *my* enjoyment, *my* satisfaction, *my* needs and *my* advantage. It was a way to sort out if someone was compatible to me. One guy said he wouldn't even really listen to a girl until she'd had sex with him. I quote: Until we know the sex is good we (men) just smile, nod and wrinkle our brows so girls think we are listening." My honest reaction was sadness.

But I found one comment from a lady that I think sums up the contrasting points of view really well. Frankly it is one of the most graceful comments posted.

*In 2 weeks, I am going to a very good friend's wedding, she is 21 and marrying a guy in his mid-20s whom she met at church and is her first boyfriend, both still virgins. As a non-church goer and a non-virgin I found this situation bizarre as did my sister, who summed it up well - 'try before you buy'. Can you really be satisfied with only ever having been with one person? The fact that they love each other is undeniable, but I*

*couldn't help but think if I were in that situation I think I would be ever wondering what if...*

*However I came to the conclusion given their belief system, sex is only one part of the equation and not the most important by far. There are essentially 3 people in the relationship, the third being God. I thought no sex before marriage was crazy and still do but really it comes down to what you deem is valuable. After all, it's you that has to make the decision and accept the consequences.*

So I want to talk tonight with two people in mind. Christians like that couple who want to hold on and people who are prepared to be as open-minded as this lady. I want to give you a reason for believing as we do. And here is what I'd tell you:

### **1. Sex is a good thing and a God thing!**

Just because we don't agree with sex before marriage doesn't mean we are against sex. We aren't and shouldn't be! We make the mistake if they see sex as a bad, dirty, somehow tainted thing. It is not. It is a good and wonderful gift from God.

The Bible has no problem talking about sexual relationships, and the commands around it are very limited in comparison to the celebrations of it. If you read the Bible, you'll get a clear sense that God not only created us as sexual beings, but meant for us to enjoy that side of our relationships. For instance:

*Genesis 1: 27-28 – "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number"*

I'm working on the basis that most of you know how we increase in number. Consider this: if God saw sex as dirty, why would He make it the basis of something as wonderful and as important to the future of humanity as having a family?

*Genesis 2:24 – "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."*

God's very design is that we would become one flesh. And this is not just a spiritual metaphor. Quite a number of times the Bible makes it very clear that God created sex to be wonderful and totally normal. For instance, I could take you to Proverbs

*Proverbs 5:18-19 – "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always..."*

Yes, you heard right. The Bible did just use the word "deer".

Or consider Song of Solomon. Song of Solomon is essentially a long poem celebrating the emotional and physical love between two people. Here's a small excerpt:

*Song of Songs 7:6 – "How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights!"*

Those delights are not the fine cookies she bakes.

There are many other biblical references besides these. God created us as sexual beings. To see sex as somehow bad or unnatural is actually unbiblical. We shouldn't be uncomfortable about sex. We know the One who thought up the idea.

So, **point 1**: – and it's an important one: sex is a good thing because it's a God thing.

**Point 2: Sex outside of marriage is against God's plan.**

The same Bible that celebrates sex also makes it clear that sex outside of marriage is sin. This is as true for sex between two consenting un-married people as it is for adultery. Now my GUESS is that most of us would not have a problem saying adultery is wrong. But the Bible takes a similar line on sex before marriage.

Consider the following 3 passages:

- *1 Corinthians 7:2-3* – "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband."
- *Hebrews 13:4* – "Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." Note that the biblical expression "sexual immorality" has always included sex before marriage.
- *1 Thessalonians 4:3-4* – "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable".

- ❖ So the Bible clearly puts sex in the context of marriage.
- ❖ It puts sex before marriage along-side of adultery and calls it immorality
- ❖ It tells us that sex before marriage is something God will judge along with all sin
- ❖ And it calls us to show self-control in that area of our lives.

**So to make it really simple, the reason why Christians say no to sex before marriage is because God says no. It's a decision to be obedient to what He tells US to do.**

Our first reaction when we hear this may be to jump to the conclusion that the Bible is just behind the times. We decide that these commandments may have been perfectly acceptable 1000 years ago, when everyone was a prude and there was no such thing as sex. But now the culture is different. It's 2009 for goodness sake. Get with the program!

But we need to change our understanding of biblical cultures. It's simply not true to think that when God first gave these commands people were all very Victorian in their attitudes to sex. Hardly! For instance, it was expected practice within the Roman elite for a married man to not only have various mistresses, but also a selection of young men and even boys to keep him entertained. Furthermore, women across all levels of society were pretty much the property of men, and this included sexually. Yes, the birth story of Jesus will tell you that Joseph wanted to marry the pregnant teenage Mary to protect her from shame. But even today unwedded teenage pregnancies aren't exactly celebrated. And just 50 years later, when tonight's passages were written, the apostle Paul was writing to *Christians* who were having sex left right and centre, including with their step-mothers! Even then God was calling His people to restrain themselves from sex before marriage at a time when culturally this was against the grain. Just, as it is now.

The other reaction we may have is to just see God as mean-spirited. After all, if sex is with someone I love, why would God want to stop it? Isn't He a God of love?

Absolutely He is! But it's here we go back to our first point: God created sex. And what He's saying to us is "enjoy it as I designed it." That is not mean-spirited. That is generous and wise.

I was in the US when I was preparing this sermon. One morning there was an infomercial on TV for a new battery operated grass and hedge cutter. This thing was amazing. It was as light as a feather. Even a girl could pick it up! It's true! They showed me!!! And it would allow me to cut all sorts of grass in all sorts of places. And because it was battery operated I could take it where electrical cables couldn't reach. Who'd have thought it! But wait – there's more: If I ordered now, I'd get all manner of manna from heaven. I sat there wondering if United Airlines would let me carry this thing on as hand-luggage.

If I had bought it, I bet you it would come with instructions that would not only remind me how fantastic this thing was, but would also tell me how NOT to use it. It would tell me not to touch the blades. It would tell me to keep it away from small children and pets. It would tell me not to put it near my eyes or use it to give my son a haircut. Now here's the question: would we say that the manufacturer was mean-spirited for telling us those things. Of course not! Why? Because those rules wouldn't *diminish* our experience of the weed-trimmer. They'd enhance it!

That's probably the worst analogy you've ever heard for God's commandments on sex before marriage. But put together all that the Bible says about sex and you see God saying this: "*Sex is something I designed for your pleasure and intimacy and for the creation of human beings. But sexual relationships are deep and complex. So here's how to enjoy it. And here's what not to do.*" His laws are not there to take the fun out of sex, but to enhance our experience of it.

But hang on – what could possibly be the downside of sex before marriage? What could God possibly be "protecting" us from or saving us for? Well, at a very basic level there is a very real risk of falling pregnant. That's wonderful – but not as a single teenager. Or I could point to the massively complex emotions that come with making love. Sex is a HUGE commitment to someone. HUGE. And when that is shared around a part of us goes with it. Or I could point to the fact that God wants our marriages to be uniquely fulfilling.

I know sex before marriage is the norm these days, but I wonder if we spoke to people who had a very active sex life before marriage and asked them "*in hindsight, do you wish you'd waited?*" I wonder if many, if honest, would say "yes". God would say "I tried to tell you."

We could go to teenagers who accidentally became parents while they were still children themselves. Ask them if they'd wished they'd waited and as much as they might love their child I think they'd say "absolutely yes". Just ask my cousin. And God would say "I wanted you to wait."

We could ask people who gave their virginity away to someone other than their spouse "*do they wish it had been with the one you are now married to*" and I bet many of them would say "yes". God would say "I wanted the best for you."

Or you could go the other way and talk to people who waited until they were married to have sex, and ask them if they were glad they did. I can promise you they would all say "absolutely yes." And God would say "I told you so."

The Bible reaffirms what all these people intuitively know: sex is a deep and wonderful thing intended for that person special enough to be in a life-long marriage commitment with. God created it with those boundaries, for our benefit.

### **Point 3: If you are a Christian, your decisions about sex become an opportunity to glorify God.**

Statistically speaking, most of you who are not yet married will be one day. And when you are, sex will likely be an enjoyable part of that relationship. But until then, God's call on your life is to wait and be self-controlled. Listen to Thessalonians again:

*"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable".*

For Christians, choosing to wait is an act of obedience. It is part of us becoming the type of person He wants us to be. And here's the thing: when we are obedient to God, and we grow in holiness, we glorify Him. So think of it this way: every single time you make the choice to stay pure in this area, you honour God. So waiting is not just an act of obedience. It is an act of worship. It's a really big deal. Your decision in this area IS something that God notices and loves. This is as true for those who will one day be married as it is for those who may never be.

Believe me, there will be people that think you are absolutely crazy, but God will not.

And we can be obedient in the area of sex with a sense of joy. Why, because we know that what He calls us to is for our own benefit. He is not a mean-spirited, out-of-touch God. He's saying "just wait" because when we wait we get to experience this incredible gift as He intended it. This is so typical of God. His commands are not there to lock us down but to give us the best.

If you are an unmarried Christian, I would love you to make a decision tonight to wait until you *are* married to have sex. This will be an act of worship to God and an incredible gift to yourself and your future husband or wife.

Let me be personal for a minute, because I know you are all wondering. Some have even asked me. Both Cathy and I came into our marriage having waited. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. But it was a hard decision to stick to, especially for me as a guy. (Every guy over 15 in this room knows what I mean.) It's one thing to want to stay the course when you're sitting in church. It's quite another when you have this incredibly beautiful person in your arms who loves you nearly as much as you love them – oh, and you are alone. This WILL happen to most of you, so let me offer you some advice. See it as brotherly advice from someone who stuck to the commitment and is unbelievably glad he did, but who didn't always find it easy to stay the course.

1. **First, make a decision to stay pure outside of marriage.** If you don't make obedience in this area a long term priority and goal, it will not happen. You have to make the decision. And you have to accept that society will think you're crazy. But that's OK.
2. **Don't confuse sex with love.** Movies are a passion for me, but most of them are rubbish when it comes to love. They will tell you that you are not really in love unless you have sex. In fact, you are not even attractive unless you have sex. Total garbage. If your boyfriend or girlfriend is not prepared to respect your wishes to wait, then they have no genuine love for you and do not deserve to be your boyfriend or girlfriend. Lose them. Seriously. Lose them. In a separate blog to the previous one I mentioned I came across this posting by some bloke called Five-am-runner:
  - I think it's a sin not to have sex before marriage...what if you don't like having sex with each other? Would you buy a car without a test-drive? Of course not... and this is waaaaayyyyyyy bigger than buying a car. So girls...you are like a car. Now do you feel loved? My guess is that this guy runs alone at 5 a.m.

3. **Don't put yourself in situations where saying no to sex will be difficult.** Here's the deal – you're not going to have trouble resisting the temptation of sex if you are having dinner with your girlfriend at her parents' house. But you are going to find it tough if you go away with her alone for the weekend, and after a nice romantic dinner promise to just see each other in the morning. Be realistic. Don't put yourself in those situations and then wonder why you failed. If this means that for a while you need to go out on more double dates, do it. Or come for coffee at our house.
4. **If you are in a relationship now, talk about the boundaries you both want to stick to.** Then choose whose limits are the most conservative. I'll be honest; this will probably be the girl's. Guys, you need to accept the limits that respect your girlfriend's dreams. Our boundaries are usually too relaxed. And again, have this discussion when you aren't feeling romantic. Do it over a coffee. In broad daylight. In public. With your little brother there. OK, not that extreme. But the point is that it is easier to design a fence when you can't see the view. Now the question you may have is "*What should the boundaries be? How far is too far?*" Well the Bible doesn't say, so it becomes a wisdom choice. I'd just say this - if your boundaries are not something that you'd feel comfortable telling a mature friend about, then you may need to rethink your boundaries.
5. **Pray about it.** Individually and as a couple. Remember, your decision to wait is an act of worship. Bring it to God. Tell Him this is for Him. Ask Him to give you self-control and wisdom. He will do it. And you will also improve your relationship in the process of praying together. (See that as a bonus tip)

Now I realize some of you are right now thinking "*well, fat lot of good this advice is now. I'm a Christian but it's too late for me.*" You've already gone further than you'd planned. If the statistics are right, many of you in your late teens and older have already had sex. And there are some of you who feel a real sense of shame, even loss about this. Well this next bit of advice is uniquely for you. And I want you to really hear this. I want this to sink to the very bottom of your heart and grip it. And here it is:

6. **It's OK. You are forgiven and you start again.** You can make the decision right here, right now, to start living in obedience and purity in this area. You see, God is a God of new beginnings. When we repent, He remembers our sin no more. Sure you can't get your virginity back, but that's irrelevant. As Christians, Jesus looks on us and sees purity. And therefore your decision to wait, from this day forward is still, absolutely, an act of obedience and worship JUST as WONDERFUL to the heart of God as the decisions taken by those who are still virgins. If you don't believe this, it means you are not trusting that the cross is big enough. I know people who are in your situation, who made such a decision and are now married and thrilled they decided to stop. Make that decision.

Finally, to **those of you who are not yet Christians.** I hope I've helped you see why we think the way we do. It's because while we believe sex is great and a gift from God, it also comes with boundaries – for our benefit. And we want to be obedient to that. But I want to say something with as much urgency and grace as I can. If you are not a Christian, you've got bigger issues to worry about than sex before marriage. There is no question that choosing to wait now will pay huge dividends when you do get married, regardless of your beliefs about Jesus. God designed sex for everyone's enjoyment, and his "usage instructions" are just as valid for you as me. But I don't want you to leave tonight thinking that all it takes to please God is to refrain from sex before marriage. He is far more interested in your life.

Remember how in Hebrews it said "*God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral?*" Well that's going to happen to you when you die – we will all be judged by God against HIS standards. But it won't just be on where we stood on sexual sin, which frankly will be like this grain of salt. No, we will be judged on every aspect of our life.

Everything we did right, everything we did wrong, and everything we failed to do. And how that judgment comes down will affect eternity for you.

If you are not a Christian, whether or not you were sexually pure won't make a difference.

But the good news is that someone CAN make a difference. And that is Jesus. You see, the Bible wants you to know that Jesus went to the cross for every sin you have ever done or will do. You just have to accept that. And then, when you die, and you stand before God on Judgment Day, God will wink knowingly at Jesus and see only your purity. It will be as if your sin was never there.

So if your big objection to faith is where Christians stand on sex before marriage, I would say don't let something so small stand in the way of something so great. Sex is wonderful, but it's not everything. It's just another area of your life where He wants the best for you. But what He wants most for you is to experience relationship with Him. That's what He cares about more than you can possibly fathom.

And for those of you young Christians, let me finish by taking you back to what that lady said right at the start of this sermon. It comes down to what you deem is valuable. Do you value obedience to God and a fulfilling sexual relationship later? Or do you value the short term highs you can get now. I hope you see that as a rhetorical question.

*David Grebert, Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland*