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SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE

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FIRST COMES LOVE, THEN COMES MARRIAGE?

GOD'S ORDER FOR MARRIAGE AND SEX

Pastor Anthony Dodgers

It is no secret that more and more couples are living together before marriage. But it is also no secret that pastors and churches still seem to have some kind of hang-up on this point. What's the big deal? Why won't pastors allow a couple to get married in the church if they are living together? By coming to the church, aren't they trying to do the right thing? Aren't pastors or congregations just being judgmental and uncaring? I suspect that when a couple hears from the pastor that living together before marriage is sinful, they conclude, "He is just being judgmental. It is his opinion, but it doesn't mean it's true for everyone." Well, I also suspect it is not your pastor's desire to be a policeman, snooping in your life and telling you what to do.

When a pastor speaks against sex outside of marriage it is not just his opinion. It is your pastor's job to preach God's Word, and in His Word God gives His judgment. God created sex for marriage. It is only within the bounds of husband and wife, that sex is pleasing to God. Therefore, the pastor and the church cannot give their approval where God has not. In a church marriage rite the pastor and congregation give their blessing to the marriage because God gives His blessing through His Word.

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In God's Word, He established an order for love and marriage. It's a simple order, contained in one verse: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Here we can see three parts to God's order. First, "a man shall leave his father and his mother." This is more than just moving out of the house. This is legal and public. It involves a ceremony. Second, he is to "hold fast to his wife." This is the part we all think we have figured out: love. Yet, maybe it's not so easy as the movies depict. Third, and finally, "they shall become one flesh." Sex comes last in God's order. It is the culmination, and it is a gift from God only when it is given with His blessing. Many in our world wish to depart from God's order. They despise His Word and get the order backwards. Yet with God's way, all Christian husbands and wives can be certain that God has blessed and will continue to bless their marriage. He will help them in their vows and He forgives them when they sin. Christians desire to hear God's Word and keep it, so let's look a little closer at these three parts to His way for marriage.

The first part is: "a man shall leave his father and his mother." As stated before, this is really a change of status. It is a legal matter so it involves a public ceremony. The ceremony acknowledges and confesses this change before the world. When a man is married to a woman a new relationship is created:

husband and wife. The parent/child relationship becomes secondary. Now, the man's primary identity is found in his marriage to this woman. The woman's primary identity is found in her marriage to this man.

The family is foundational for all our relationships and for society. The government is required to protect marriage because the government is required to protect its citizens. Marriage creates a legal relationship for the good of society. Husbands and wives enter the estate of marriage with public, legally binding vows and are expected to remain in it and to raise up children where possible. God actually works through these vows to compel husbands and wives to remain faithful in marriage and to care for one another. Without the external compulsion of public, legal marriage vows, the relationship is easily dissolved. Couples may abandon each other when they no longer see their relationship as convenient or when feelings for one another change.

This is probably why so many couples choose to live together without marriage. They may not want to admit it, but it means there is an easy way out when circumstances get difficult or when problems with their partner come to the surface. They are testing out the relationship but there is no real commitment. There are no court cases or disputes over property if they quit. They live together but everything stays separate. This is the very opposite of marriage! In marriage, neither husband nor wife lives independently. Husband and wife live together and *for* one another. The refusal of marriage for the fear of hard times and disappointment is simply a love of one's self, which is not true love at all. While many claim that living together before marriage prepares a couple for marriage, the love of self is the exact opposite of what a marriage should be. The habits established in this selfish way are difficult to overcome if a couple actually is married.

The second part of God's order for marriage is that a man shall "hold fast to his wife." This is the part that every couple thinks they have down: they love each other. What they have is romantic feelings and

affection for each other. Yet, what is not often recognized is how our society's definition of love and the Bible's definition of love are very different. In the Bible, love is not merely an emotion, a feeling that may or may not last. Love is an action. It involves the will. In Ephesians 5, St. Paul instructs wives to: "submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord," and husbands to: "love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:22 & 25). In both cases love is an action. We see this most clearly in the love of our Savior for His church. He didn't just have a feeling for His bride or find her attractive and pleasant to be around, He died for her. This is another reason why husbands and wives make vows to each other. They don't just say, "I love you." They say, "I will." Weighty promises are made by a man and woman when they promise to be a wedded wife or husband. They promise "to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy will; and I pledge you my faithfulness" (Lutheran Service Book, Holy Matrimony, pg. 276). Feelings change, passions die out, but the vows made at your wedding are not a statement of current feelings, but the promise of a lifetime of action even when the feelings don't match.

The third and culminating part of God's order is the two "shall become one flesh." This encompasses many aspects of a couple's life together. It involves emotional, spiritual, and mental unity. Yet it is primarily a physical unity. This is where sex fits in God's order for marriage. It is here, after the promises have been made and witnessed, that a husband and wife can be truly open and intimate with one another. There is a vulnerability that comes with sex, but that is not a weakness when the two have committed themselves to each other.

Marriage is for our good. Through marriage God keeps our passions in check. Within marriage sex is a wonderful gift from God and an expression of love and devotion between husband and wife. Sex between a

husband and wife avoids sins of sexual impurity and is pleasing to God because it is done in accordance with His will. It is through this gift that He also gives more gifts: children who are placed in a safe home, protected by the bonds of marriage. Outside of marriage sex is sinful, damaging to one's relationship with God and with any partners involved.

So when a man and woman are living together outside of marriage, when they are having sex outside of marriage, what should they do? Can they get married in the church? Like all sins, it is a matter of repentance and faith. This is why pastors meet with couples who want to get married. It's not about your pastor being nosy or uptight or old-fashioned. It's his job to obey God's Word and preach it. This means your sins are exposed by God's Law. That can be embarrassing. It hurts and it's inconvenient. And yet, we can never offer God an excuse or justification for breaking His Law. So when a pastor says that sex outside of marriage is sinful and must stop, the goal is for the sinners to repent and the sin to be forgiven. When people rebel against this Law, when they reject the need for repentance, they are also rejecting the opportunity to receive the absolution. They are denying God's forgiveness and so denying their Savior. However, when they confess their sin and receive forgiveness, they are able to enter marriage joyfully with a clean conscience and pure heart. They enter marriage in the sure knowledge that God is their Savior, that He is pleased with their marriage, and places His blessing upon it. Strong marriages are built on forgiveness. If He forgives them at the beginning, He will stay with them throughout their married life.

Finally, couples that have repented of their sin and wish to get married should "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8). You cannot confess your sin of sex outside of marriage and go on living in sin until the wedding. How you deal with this will be up to you and your pastor, but here are some points to consider. Hebrews 10:26 warns us, "if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins."

If we confess our sins, but make no attempt to correct our lives, we are then despising God's forgiveness. Even if a couple is living together without having sex (a situation difficult to imagine given our sinful nature and God's gift of sexuality), it gives the appearance of sin and will be a stumbling block for others. Usually a repentant couple separates until the wedding and remains celibate in keeping with God's Law and order for marriage. When there are circumstances that make a separation difficult (for example, when the couple already has children and can't move them), then repentance can still be demonstrated by abstaining from sex and getting married as quickly as possible, separating for at least a short time immediately before the wedding. It could be that a couple chooses to have a quiet church ceremony or get married before a judge, and then have a larger celebration and renewal of vows later. Again, these are decisions that have to be made between the couple and their pastor. However, the goal is always for the couple to begin their marriage with clean consciences and with God's blessing, in accordance with His Word and by the power of His forgiveness.

Here is an exhortation from St. Paul for all Christians, but especially those in relationships: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). Our world pressures us to give in to the desires of our sinful flesh. God's Word demands something different. So many people are happy with whatever feels good, at least for the moment. God's Word is concerned about our eternal well-being. Marriage and sex really come down to faith. Do I trust myself, my emotions, this culture, this world? Or do I trust God? God's Word says what is best for us, in this life and for eternity. It is not easy but Christians are called to fight the pressures of this world and our sinful flesh, to be conformed and transformed by God's Word. And with His Word God gives His promise to be with you, forgive you, and bless you. †

BOOK REVIEWS

Family Vocation, God's Calling in Marriage, Parenting, and Childhood. By Gene Edward Veith Jr. & Mary J. Moerbe. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012. 233 pages.

For Better Not for Worse, a Manual of Christian Matrimony. By Walter A. Maier I. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939. 564 pages.

I decided to review two books on the topic of this publication because of the era that each was written. The Maier book is no longer in publication by Concordia Publishing House but can be found on used book websites like half.com and amazon.com. I recently read the Veith & Moerbe book and was immediately reminded of what I had read many years earlier in the Maier publication. Even though they were written 73 years apart they contain very much the same outline and substance.

It is more than coincidence that the foreseeable problems with the American culture in 1939 would have devastating effect on the families of today. It is not known if Veith & Moerbe used Maier as a resource but the predictions of 1939 have been confirmed in the 2012 publication. To read both of these books together is an eye opening experience as to how far our culture has fallen in regard to marriage and divorce. The statistics of concern voiced by Maier are born out in the work reported by Veith.

Each book takes a comprehensive look at the biblical elements of marriage and family. It is followed by the social impact healthy families have on society as well as the confession healthy families make before the entire church. Veith & Moerbe present a more precise view of the doctrine of marriage, parenting, and the role of a biblical child than does Maier. Each book is so

well researched and referenced that they could be used as resources for home devotions or bible class material.

Veith and Moerbe present a challenge to the modern day family that is both thought provoking and counter cultural in our day. Veith levies the challenges that Maier alluded to 73 years earlier. It makes the reader wonder what our society would look like today had Maier's voice been heeded. It also makes one wonder what succeeding generations will look like if Veith and Moerbe are also ignored.

Both books give reason for hope and courage for family life based on the promises of God in Christ Jesus. Each author points the reader to the cross where death was actually the source of our life. The consistency of both books is and can only be founded on the common confession each author has from the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. I recommend either of both of these books for a good study on marriage and family.

Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders
IDE President

WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT DIVORCE?

Pastor Herbert Mueller III

And Pharisees came up to [Jesus] and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:3-6)

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." (Matthew 5:31-32)

You shall not commit adultery. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other. (Small Catechism, 6th Commandment)

Never has there been a time when issues concerning the Sixth Commandment were handled correctly by fallen mankind.

Divorce is a case in point. What has approval in the civil sphere, among the courts, does not have the approval of God. Sometimes, however, a divorce is

recognition that the marriage has already been destroyed by one of the parties. In this case, Jesus permits divorce only "on the ground of sexual immorality." In this situation, the one-flesh union has already been destroyed by marital infidelity.

The word there for "sexual immorality" in the Greek is "*porneia*." (The English word "pornography" comes from this Greek word.) *Porneia* means sexual intercourse in general outside marriage. The spouse that divorces on the grounds of *porneia* does not cause the other to commit adultery. Adultery has already been committed and the deepest levels of the one flesh union are already broken. "The spouse who suffers this form of abandonment may (though certainly not *must*) put away the partner guilty of *porneia* without forcing such a one into adultery." ("Divorce and Remarriage: An Exegetical Study" CTCR report, 1987, p. 25)

Divorce where marital infidelity has not taken place, however, is the active destruction of the marriage by one or both of the parties. Our Lord Jesus Christ points to God's institution of marriage and says, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Most of what follows is directed at divorce where the one-flesh union has not yet been destroyed by infidelity.

Divorce is the destruction of a vow. When a bridegroom stands before God and says, "I (name), take you, (name), to be my wedded wife, to have and

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to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy will; and I pledge to you my faithfulness," this is the language of a vow. The bride's vow is the same. They exchange rings, visible reminders of the vows they have spoken to one another.

While not specific to marriage, Scripture has this to say about vows:

Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the people of Israel, saying, "This is what the LORD has commanded. If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. If a woman vows a vow to the LORD and binds herself by a pledge, while within her father's house in her youth, and her father hears of her vow and of her pledge by which she has bound herself and says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand, and every pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand. (Numbers 30:1-4)

In Deuteronomy 23 we read this about the obligation of vows:

If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin... You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth. (Deuteronomy 23:21, 23)

It is clear by these words and others that breaking a vow is serious business. Whether the vow is broken before the divorce in the form of infidelity or desertion, or the vow is broken by the divorce itself, divorce is still a tragedy, breaking what should not be broken.

Divorce is the destruction of a person. It was not good for the man to be alone. The very first wedding is recorded in Genesis chapter 2. There, God presents the woman to the man. She is the "helper fit for him." The word "helper" has been at the brunt of much discussion. Some have even gone so far as to accuse the biblical writers of hating women. The

Hebrew word "helper" here, however, does not mean inferiority or unimportance. God is also called a "help" using the same word. (cf. Ps. 33:20) The idea of "helper fit for him" is that the man and the woman were made for each other.

At that first marriage, the man didn't have a low view of his wife. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" He recognized that he was limited without the woman. Is it possible to live a God-pleasing life totally single and apart from marriage? Yes. This may be necessary, especially in times of persecution as the Apostle Paul recommends, but it is not the normal order of things that God set up in the Garden of Eden. God created us for marriage. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Far beyond the merely sexual, this one flesh union is taken seriously in Scripture. Jesus reiterates, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh." They are one flesh in the marriage bed, yes, that is true. But they are also one flesh as they live together, as they have children together, as they cleave to one another. This one flesh union is destroyed in divorce. Our culture focuses primarily on what I, the individual, need and want. Independence and self-determination are the altars at which we sacrifice. The one flesh union of marriage just becomes one more of those sacrifices one makes when "what I want" or "what I seem to think I need" is threatened by it. But this is never how God intended us to be: destroyed half-people seeking only what we as individuals think we want and need.

The relationship between bridegroom and bride, husband and wife is described by Paul in Ephesians chapter 5.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the LORD. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and give Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her,

having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body.” (Ephesians 5:22-30)

The focus of husband and wife is to be on the other. Ideally, in marriage, God turns our selfish nature outward to our spouse. This looks different for both husband and wife because husbands and wives are different from one another.

Wives submit; the word in the Greek means “to subject oneself, be subjected or subordinated, obey.” It’s submission involving the recognition of an ordered structure. The fact that our current egalitarian society doesn’t think this is helpful or good doesn’t change what God’s Word says. Let the world go on with its selfishness and self-actualization which leads to divorce.

Husbands love. And their love is to be just like Christ’s love for the church. Christ sacrificed Himself for the church. He shed His blood for her. And likewise, a husband is to lay down his life in sacrificial love for his wife. He does not consider what he can get out of the relationship, but what he can give. He receives blessing when he cares for his wife, loving her as his own body. Again, even if our current society doesn’t think this is helpful or good, this doesn’t change what God’s Word says.

Notice that this is not merely a picture of how a married couple ought to live. More important is the picture that Paul gives us of what it means for Christ to be the Bridegroom, who lays down His life for His bride, the Church. Something wicked and sinister happens when the Bridegroom is separated from His bride. When this picture is dashed to pieces in the form of divorce there are spiritual consequences. One’s trust in the Bridegroom is harmed because one’s relationship with one’s spouse is destroyed.

Divorce is the destruction of a family. This may be a bit redundant, but it’s also true. Children are affected by divorce. God brings man and woman together as husband and wife, and then when children are born, as father and mother. Children are best reared and cared for in a home with a father and a mother. We should have compassion for any single parent, and just the fact that a child has a single parent does not automatically mean that things will turn out poorly for the child. It just means that things will be harder. There is something about the office of father and the office of mother that is essential in the development of children.

Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 6: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the LORD.” (Ephesians 6:4) Divorce, the breaking of a vow and the destruction of the one flesh union, teaches children the exact opposite of the “training and instruction of the LORD.” One of the definitions of “exasperation” could be one of the many ways divorced parents use their children to get at their former spouse.

Divorce, except in the case of sexual immorality, abuse, or abandonment, is sin against God. This is the conclusion of the above sections. Jesus says in Matthew 19:9, “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” In Mark 10:11-12 again Jesus says, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

Paul is very clear about this as well in 1 Corinthians 7:

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the LORD): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

As a general rule this is true. Yet in the cases of infidelity, abandonment (a spouse leaves with no plan to return), or abuse, divorce is biblically permitted.

Jesus Christ died for your sins. Those who suffer because of divorce need our compassion. Those who have committed the sin of infidelity or abuse or abandonment need to hear the Law in all its terror. They need to know that their actions have destroyed their relationship with God as well as with their spouse. If the offender is a church member and is unrepentant in the face of God's Law, the destruction of their relationship with God must be made very clear through the proper use of the binding key, i.e. excommunication. When contrite, they then need to hear the good news that their sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Those who have suffered the brunt of their spouse's sin need to know that they don't have to divorce their spouse, but they may divorce on the grounds that the one-flesh union has already been destroyed by their spouse's actions. Here is a situation that calls for discernment and tact. One must approach such situations with great compassion. It can be that one spouse is nearly one hundred percent to blame for the failure of the marriage, but there may still be feelings of guilt even in the one that does not bear the brunt of the blame. There will be opportunities for confession and forgiveness here for them as well.

Those who are intent on destroying their marriage even when no marriage-destroying infidelity, abuse, or abandonment has happened need to hear God's Law in all its sternness. Again, they are destroying their relationship with God by destroying their marriage. If they are church members and they are not repentant, the proper use of the binding key, or excommunication, is warranted. When contrite, they then need to hear the good news that Jesus Christ took their sins on His back. They ought to attempt reconciliation and forgiveness with their spouse or ex-spouse.

All in all, compassion, reconciliation, and forgiveness are the watchwords when dealing with divorce. The goal should never be for the pastor or the church to "put a good spin" on the divorce or "give their approval" for the divorce. Only in the case of marital infidelity, physical abuse, or abandonment is

divorce permissible, and even then it does not have to happen. "What God has joined together, let man not separate." †

HOMOSEXUALITY

UNDERSTANDING AND HOPE

Pastor Michael Holmen

Over the past couple of years homosexuality has become an important issue in our society. There have been significant changes. The state of Iowa is one of the states where homosexual marriage is legal. The military did away with the 1990's policy, "Don't ask, don't tell." Many television programs have become advocates for acceptance of gay, lesbian, transgendered, bisexual, and questioning people. This is also an issue in many mainline denominations. The Episcopalians, the Presbyterians (PCUSA), the United Churches of Christ (UCC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have officially sanctioned homosexual relationships, and it appears that many other churches will follow their lead. I have also noticed a program in our schools, anti-bullying campaigns, and along with run-of-the-mill bullying these programs also seem to advocate acceptance of those children who have same sex attraction or typically homosexual characteristics. This issue, then, is very relevant. It is a local, state, and national movement. So what are we to think about it? What are we to say about it?

To begin, I think it is very helpful to first understand our God-given sexuality. Human sexuality is a gift from God that has been given to us creatures. It is

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one of the ways that men and women have been bound together in order that they may remain in union. It is a desire and an appetite that is not in itself sinful. It is similar to our other appetites such as our hunger and thirst. Just think of it—if eating and drinking were not pleasurable, but a chore, how would anyone be healthy and strong? So it is also with our sexual appetites. They are meant to serve as a powerful bond. God says in Genesis chapter 2, "It is not good for man to be alone." This is one of the reasons why God created Eve from Adam's rib. It was so that husband and wife would leave their fathers and mothers and cling to one another. This clinging is a sexual union. "The two become one flesh." This is a also new family with all kinds of other strong bonds—emotional, psychological, etc.

Within this divine establishment of marriage, sexuality is blessed by God. In fact, there is no other facet of human life that has so wonderful and beautiful a seal as marriage. The seal is the creation of new life that comes with children. It is as though God exalts and crowns marriage and the sexual union with the most precious thing we know—procreation. Through the creatures of man and woman God creates and furthers what he loves. God loves life. That is why He sent His only-begotten Son to redeem the world, so that all who believe in him shall not *perish* but have eternal *life*.

Since God loves life, he protects it with his

commandments. The commandments are like a wall around all of God's good things so that the devil (who loves perversion and death) may be thwarted. Therefore, we have the Sixth Commandment: You shall not commit adultery. Marriage and sexual union is a great gift and so God prohibits anyone from disrupting, perverting, or destroying that which God has instituted and blesses. This means that the appetites and desires that we have for sexual gratification are to be within the bounds of matrimony. Within matrimony, as we have said, God whole-heartedly approves and blesses this union—even by creating new life through the very expression of sexuality. Outside of matrimony, God forbids it. This means that fornication (the more formal word for “sleeping around”) is forbidden. Also, when a man and woman are married, adultery (union with someone who is not your spouse) is forbidden. Unlawful divorce is forbidden. As Jesus says, “That which God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6).

Sexual desire is to be for one's spouse. Therefore when a man and a woman truly desire one another (and not just lust after one another) they should become married. (It really is that simple, but I should also note that the help and approval of one's parents are very helpful in this matter.) Once married, husband and wife must confine their desires to one another. All of this is summarized by the explanation to the Sixth Commandment in the Small Catechism: “We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do and that husband and wife love and honor each other.”

The basis of sexuality is marriage. This is God's design and commandment. But our society has popularized a very different basis for sexuality. Sexual union is not determined by God's joining of one man and one woman. Instead sexual union is determined by the desires of the individuals. If two people love one another and believe it is “right,” then they may have sex with one another. If husband and wife no longer wish to be married, they can easily obtain divorce. I don't think I need to spend much time trying to prove

that this basis is the norm deeply entrenched in our society. Not one night of television can go by without seeing this understanding of sexuality enacted many times over.

When the basis for sexual union is a person's desires, then it is only logical that homosexuals should be able to act on their desires too. It has not escaped the attention of homosexual advocates that heterosexuals can be very hypocritical in their condemnation of homosexuality. Straight people, so they say, can do whatever they want sexually speaking, while homosexuals cannot. And they are right about that. It is hypocritical. An utter failure in understanding sexuality, marriage, and family among heterosexuals has preceded and even paved the way for the homosexual movement. Heterosexual perversion is just as wrong as the perversion of same sex attraction. We must not be hypocrites in our condemnation of homosexuality, but proceed in a deep spirit of repentance.

Jesus says, “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (Matthew 7:3-5). We are in need of renewal. We need to get the log out of our eye so that we can begin to see clearly. We need to learn and teach about marriage and encourage young people to enter into it. We need to encourage those who are in the estate of marriage to remain in it and be faithful to their spouse. Our society likes to portray the Bible's teaching on marriage and sexuality as a burdensome wet blanket. This is not true. Marriage is a vital, potent, lovely force. God has instituted it, protects it with his commandments, blesses it with new life. We must learn that sexuality is not just about gratification or entertainment. It is for fidelity, honesty, and

love of one's spouse rather than mere enjoyment for one's self.

The Sixth Commandment is broken by whoever has lust for those whom God has not given in marriage. If we do not understand this as a disease that afflicts both those with the natural sexual desire for the opposite sex *as well as* those who are attracted to the same sex, then we cannot expect to be heard by those who are lost in homosexual desires and lifestyles. Hypocrisy is offensive. What's more, even if we do get through to people about the sinfulness of same sex attraction, but do not understand marriage and God's blessing of sexuality, we will not know where to guide them. It will be like the blind leading the blind. Both fall into the pit and remain in darkness.

The devil delights in the darkness of guilt and shame, especially the type of humiliation that comes with sexual sins. We must bring the light of God's Word and blessing into this important area of our life. We must guide all people to the blessings of forgiveness. God heals sinners, even those who suffer from sexual perversion.

The devil would like to take away all hope of ever changing, of ever becoming sexually pure. But he is a liar and a murderer. There is hope. Christ Jesus has come to defeat the devil and all his works and all his ways. He has come to set us free from our sins so that we may be children of God—children of the light rather than children of the darkness. Christ takes away our shame by forgiving us and gives us the sure hope of a good conscience before God.

Therefore, whoever is reading this article and is weighed down with the weight of sexual sin, I encourage you to seek out your pastor. He has been commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive the sins of all the penitent. His forgiveness is Christ's forgiveness as Jesus himself says to the twelve disciples in the upper room: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (John 20:22-23). Let God set your feet in the right way by the forgiveness of your sins and the light of God's Word. Don't suffer

alone, but seek the grace and protection that Christ gives through his Church, his ministers, and his people. Don't lose hope. †