

## Sexuality and Salvation

The Anglican world is embroiled at the present time in the issue of human sexuality as it relates to the ordination of homosexual persons. Vast amounts of time are being consumed as orthodox and heterodox wage warfare over the authority of the Bible concerning the nature of human sexuality. The issue is of fundamental importance to the continuance of the Church as the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

Although this issue rightly occupies those in the Church concerned with the preservation of the apostolic gospel, there are other issues of human sexuality that the church needs to confront and consider if Christian marriage is to survive amidst the highly sexualized culture in which we live.

As a Christian pastor I am increasingly aware of very real tensions in Christian marriages over the issue of sexuality. While I do not possess large statistical information to verify my concerns, I have been involved over many years with the frustration over sexuality that exists in many Christian relationships. It is not that there is a lack of sufficient Christian manuals and books related to the matter of the mutual responsibilities of husbands and wives with respect to the biblical teaching of sexuality, but rather, a lack of willingness to comply with the biblical instruction especially, is seems, on the part of the wives. While this is not the place or vehicle to express in detail the practice of sexuality within the marriage relationship, it is I believe crucial that Christian husbands and wives consider this subject within the sphere of what the gospel means when referring to human salvation.

Within the context of marriage counselling and in speaking with men about their sexual relationship with their wives, it is very apparent that men are generally far from content with the amount of sexual gratification that they receive from their wives. No one would dispute I trust, the differences that exist between males and females with respect to human sexual desires. There are also the differences of temperaments that exist within the respective genders which modify human sexual behaviour. It is also clear, in by observations, that men's thoughts and desires for sexual expression are more constant and pressing than those of their wives. Numerous men have spoken to me concerning their intense frustration in endeavouring to speak with their wives and come to some mutual agreement as to how this tension and frustration could be lessened or alleviated. It is apparent that many wives are very reluctant to discuss openly with their husbands this issue, which only compounds the level of tension in the relationship. Why are women so reluctant to discuss openly this issue? Many answers could be supplied. One answer would relate to the 'fallen' nature of our humanity; discussing the intimacy of our sexuality is not always as easy as we might first expect; a certain reserve and awkwardness often hinder frank and open discussion. Another answer may relate to the wife's requirements of certain 'conditions' that have not been fulfilled on the part of her husband, as the reason for her reluctance or refusal to engage in sexual intimacy or even discuss the issue.

It is not the purpose of this brief article to explore all the scenarios related to above question, but to consider another biblical perspective with a view to alleviating the rising frustration that currently exists.

The biblical teaching with respect to the mutual responsibilities of husbands and wives to fulfill the sexual needs of each other are set forth plainly in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 7 the Divine Author of Scripture says in verse 2-5,

*“since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.*

*The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.*

*The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.*

*Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”*

This article cannot consider in detail the biblical teaching concerning the issue of ‘submission’ on the part of the wife to her husband (see Ephesians 5:21f; Colossian 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1f) but it would not be possible to endorse/embrace such ‘submission’ on the part of the wife, without including the above passage as a necessary part of such ‘submission’.

Any wives reading this article may at this point object that I have not referred to the husbands responsibilities within the marriage relationship. You would be right. Husbands do have very clear responsibilities towards their wives and the biblical teaching concerning ‘submission’ does not mean that the husband can act in any way that is not consistent with the sacrificial love of Christ for the Church. However, the injunctions for both the husband and wife within marriage are not ‘conditional’ upon certain ideal expectations being met; these injunctions or commands are part and parcel of the marriage contract, though they are obviously made more easy to keep when each party complies with their obligations.

It is very clear from the above passage of Scripture that the Lord of the Church to whom the wife ‘submits’ (when she submits to her husband) indicates the immense and intense strain that is placed on Christian marriage when either party looks for ‘excuses’ to avoid fulfilling their Christian obligation. It is certainly clear from my counselling that many Christian husbands are increasingly intimidated by their wives refusal to consider the struggle their husband is facing in “lack of self-control”. This is not a ‘failure’ on your husbands part, it is an acknowledgement of the human sexual dilemma that can be eased by the wife’s compliance.

Does this mean that wives are to oblige their husbands ‘on demand’? No, but it does mean she is to be considerate. Such consideration will mean that a wife should be willing to discuss this matter with her husband and agree to find sexual solutions to release her husbands tensions. Implicit in her creation as a ‘helper fit’(Gen 2:18) for

husband must be her acknowledgement of the sexual contentment her role is meant to provide.

At this point I need to raise once again the question (from my counselling experience) why it is that many Christian wives seem so reluctant to be considerate in this manner? It is not simply a matter of her finding 'fault' with her husband to excuse her compliance; nor is her 'tiredness', when it becomes a prolonged denial of his sexual needs, a valid reason. Is in fact our reluctance to fulfill our mutual obligations as husbands and wives a symptom of a selfishness that refuses to submit to Scripture, and a presumption upon the biblical teaching of God's grace in salvation?

I gave the title 'Sexuality and Salvation' to this short article. The title was chosen deliberately. The Christian understanding of 'grace' has been severely distorted in the Church today. For most Christian's grace is merely the free offer of salvation on the basis of faith in Christ; not of 'works' or human merit lest any man/woman should boast. Many people who call themselves Christians in the Church today have little understanding of the relationship between obedience to God's commands and the 'faith' that they assume saves them - in isolation from those commands. I have said in another article on this Website (Justification by faith and the Decline of the Anglican Church) that while 'Grace grants us a reprieve from the Law's condemnation it does not release us from the Law's obligation'. Only faith in the atoning work of Christ can secure our salvation; but the faith that grasps such grace is thoroughly active in its ardent pursuit of obedience. In other words faith is both an intellectual assent and an intimate and imitating obedience to the commands of Christ. New Testament faith is intent on the ardent pursuit of obedience. This is the only faith that is 'saving'! It is faith that rests on Christ alone for salvation but never rests in its obedience to all the commands of Scripture, including the mutual commands of sexual responsibilities between husbands and wives.

It is my personal belief that the failure of many Christian wives to comply with their sexual responsibilities towards their husbands is symptomatic of a far more widespread failure of those who call themselves Christians to see obedience as integral to their personal salvation. No, we are not 'saved by obedience, but we will not be saved without such obedience! Those who are playing 'foot loose and fancy free' with respect to obedience to God need not expect to be saved, no matter how well they think they understand the death of Jesus on the cross. This all too brief article is written so that both husbands and wives would see their mutual obligations to serve one another in the realm of sexuality, and vindicate the grace they have received through Christ for salvation. It is also a plea that Christian wives will see the greater vulnerability to which their husbands are exposed in this area, and to be more considerate to his 'weakness' in temptation and frustration.

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