

Sexual Sin

Combatting the Drifting and Cheating

Jeffrey S. Black



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I once counseled a man who had been involved in a series of sex crimes. He had been caught, arrested, and indicted by the time his lawyer referred him to me. A believer in his late fifties, he was a widower with several children who lived out of state. At the time the sex crimes were committed, his wife had been dead for about ten years.

The marriage had been very troubled. There had been fights and he'd been thrown out of the house. His wife had been hospitalized on a number of occasions for depression. During those times the couple obviously had no sexual involvement, and the man told me that he had had several affairs while his wife had been unavailable sexually. He seemed to think that made them less objectionable.

This man also told me that he had had several exploratory homosexual relationships, prior to his marriage, in his late teens and early twenties. During his marriage and after his wife's death, he had had a very close relationship with his daughter, so intense that I thought perhaps there had been some incestu-

ous things going on, but he said no. However, it was clear that his daughter had functioned in other ways as a surrogate spouse for him. When she was in her thirties, she decided to move away. Approximately a year after that, he began sexual involvements with two teenage boys.

Sexual Immorality as “Cheating”

This man’s story illustrates two ways of thinking about sexual sin. The first is what I call sexual immorality as a way of “cheating.” Typically, we think of cheating in terms of having an affair with somebody who is not your spouse. My meaning here is a little different. Ephesians 5:31–32 reads:

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Scripture is very clear that God intends marriage to be an expression or a metaphor for

our relationship with Christ. It is intended to mirror the profound, mysterious, spiritual union that takes place when we come into our relationship with him. Paul states in Galatians 2 that in some sense we've been *united* with Christ. Christ has become part of us; we've been indwelt by his Spirit. Clearly, it's a mystical and spiritual union for which human vocabulary falls short.

Marriage is intended to picture that relationship as an expression of intense companionship and intimacy. Scripture says that two become one. And God says that sexuality in a marriage relationship is supposed to be an expression of that companionship, an expression and consequence of that intimacy.

In 1 Corinthians 6:15-17, Paul is talking about sexual immorality:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Sexuality is a way of physically identifying and experiencing oneness. In my opinion, sexuality is supposed to be the expression of a oneness *that already exists*. Interestingly, the world reverses that. It says that if you want to experience oneness, you have sex with someone. God says "No." You have oneness first, and your sex has meaning only when it expresses a unity that already exists. Sexual union never *produces* intimacy; it only enhances it. Or perhaps, in some sense, completes it.

Sex Without Intimacy

The desire for sex in a relationship that otherwise lacks intimacy is one of the most common complaints in marriage. A husband comes looking for affection, while his wife complains that he never talks, he doesn't listen, and he spends his "down" time in front of the television. "But he always seems to come alive when we go to bed," she notes. Sometimes she will consent to sex, but then gives in to resentment. If this husband thinks that snuggling in bed will draw his wife close to him, he is making a critical mistake. The sex may impact him positively, but it won't produce the communion that his wife longs for

and that God prescribes for marriage. God always says that sexuality is supposed to be an expression of a communion that *already* exists.

I call the behavior of my sex-offender counselee “cheating” because his whole sexual life—his marriage, his extramarital affairs, and even the deviant sexual behavior he exhibited—was his attempt to experience sex without intimacy. He was lazy. He didn’t want to strive for intimacy in his relationships. He didn’t want to strive for it in his relationship with his wife; hence, the adultery. He found his intimacy in a convenient relationship with his daughter, which God says is no place for him to have it. I believe that is one of the reasons his daughter moved away. This man was a cheater. God had laid out a plan, and he ignored that plan to do things his own way.

As I worked with him, I asked about the possibility of getting remarried. He said, “Well, I just don’t want another marriage to turn out like my first one.” That’s understandable, but what was he really saying? He was saying, “I don’t want to work at intimacy. I want the consequences of sexuality, but I don’t want to achieve it in the way God designs it.” After his daughter left, this man began to attach himself to two kids who lived nearby. They began to serve this cheating purpose in his life.

Any time you see a person engage in illicit sexual behavior, you can be sure that he or she is a cheater. He wants sexual gratification without intimacy. That means that when you're trying to help someone who comes with a problem of pornography, a sexual problem in the marriage relationship, or even an involvement in a bizarre and perverted form of sexuality, at root he doesn't want to experience sexuality in the context for which God designed it. This person must be confronted with God's program, and that program is intimacy.

Self-Centeredness and Sex

When you are trying to help people who have problems with pornography, one thing you have to understand is that pornography has a very simple goal. That goal is masturbation. When someone produces a pornographic movie or magazine (in an industry obviously targeted towards men), the goal is masturbation. But more than that, the goal of the pornography and the masturbation is to create a substitute for intimacy.

Masturbation is sex with yourself. If I'm having sex with myself, I don't have to invest myself in another person. People who are "addicted" to

pornography aren't so much addicted to lurid material as they're addicted to self-centeredness. They're committed to serving themselves, to doing whatever they can to find a convenient way not to die to self, which is the nature of companionship in a relationship.

The self-centeredness shows up in many different ways. For example, there are some pedophiles who view even preadolescent children as adult sexual partners. In these instances they don't think, "I want to have sex with a child." Instead, they see the child as their sexual, physical, and emotional equal. To do otherwise would be to de-center, to *not* see everything through the lens of their own experience. That is dying to self, that's intimacy, that's companionship, that's loving somebody else, which is precisely what these individuals are unwilling to do.

Scripture offers the very best model for understanding this kind of sexual sin. The psychological literature offers countless explanations for these behaviors that are all designed *not* to end up focusing on you. They are designed to end up preoccupied with your history, your traumatic experiences, and your mother. They are not designed to end up with you.

But Scripture always focuses on the heart.

Because God plans sexuality to be an expression of oneness, any form of sexual perversion is a perversion of God's plan of intimacy. Whether you are trying to help a person whose sexual behavior makes you physically ill or someone with "garden variety" sexual problems in marriage, the problems always go back to the image of intimacy because that is the root of God's intention for sexuality. Genesis 2:18—"It is not good for the man to be alone"—means that your most basic goal is to teach this person to die to self and to love others more than himself or herself.

Intimacy or Addiction?

While counseling the man I described earlier, I received a phone call from his attorney. The attorney was a believer and sympathetic to biblical counseling, but he wanted his client to attend a sex addicts clinic in the belief that the judge would then give him a lighter sentence. I believed that the man was no longer a threat. He seemed well grounded at that point and I did not want to see him go to jail. I believed he had repented and that he was doing some good work in counseling. So I agreed.

What a mistake! He didn't go to jail, but in