**Is God a Prude About Sex?**

By Bill Strom

**Have you ever thought that God smiles on love but frowns on sex?** As if God wants us to love others, but has prudish rules for how we can show it sexually? For example the Bible teaches:

Run away from adolescent lust.

Save sex for marriage.

Don’t do it with your neighbor’s spouse.

We might think that God forgot that he made us sexual creatures. Doesn’t God know we have biological needs and the right to pleasure ourselves as long as it’s consensual and not hurting anyone? At least that’s what our hippy parents said, and for the most part, it works.

**I guess it works if you don’t know anything better.**

*Better than what* you might ask. I think a lot of us today think sex-in-the-moment or sex-with-multiple-partners is just sex today. But I think the best sex and the most good comes within a committed and exclusive relationship.

Prove it you say.

**Ok. Two facts prove it for me, one regarding porn and the other infidelity.**

The first is that that while porn gives immediate pleasure and perhaps even orgasm, it ultimately diminished our sexual pleasures with our real-life partner. The evidence is overwhelming.

For decades now we have known of research by Dolf Zillmann at the University of Indiana and Jennings Bryant at the University of Houston who ran experiments with subjects consuming varying degrees of filmed porn. They found that the more people watched, the more they…

* disliked their spouse’s sexual performance
* disliked their spouse’s affection
* considered their spouse less attractive
* judged their spouse as not being sexually curious
* wondered if marriage and monogamy were worth it
* viewed out-of-wedlock sex as common and okay

Now the push-back might be that if you are in a dumpy relationship, then perhaps your dissatisfaction is causing you to find stimulation elsewhere. That could be the case, but not in this experiment.

**The study was designed to see the effect of porn on relationships, not the other way around, and it found that using porn leads to hurtful relational attitudes.**

More recently we know from brain science that regularly using porn and masturbating with it furrows neurological pathways such that sex with our partners registers less pleasurable, not more. But without the abuse, we can train our mind towards more pleasure with our lover.

**I bet this brain science stuff is no surprise to God.**

The second fact is that sex in a committed relationship is better than infidelity sex, that is, commitment increases sexual responsiveness. I know that’s not what the media depict as characters with little history enjoy the covers with seeming ease and explosive sensuality. That image of sex attracts viewers and sells advertising, but it doesn’t line up with the research.

**But you say, what’s wrong with a little Kate and Edith too? Or Jake and Ethan too?**

Because you take Edith and Ethan home with you in your emotions and loins. You have less to give at home, and it takes effort to keep up the façade.

For example, in one study the researcher asked men to indicate the degree they were faithful—not sexually faithful necessarily but things like loyal, committed, reliable, and following through on promises. The study also asked each wife if she thought her husband supported her emotionally, and was a good time. The results showed that the more husbands harbored thoughts of unfaithfulness, the less wives thought him emotionally present and fun.

**This makes sense.** **When we are hiding an affair, we’re drained. The net effect is less happiness at home. So if you’re into happiness, be informed that infidelity doesn’t deliver.**

In related research, we know that…

* Partners who cheat report having less romance in their marriage.
* Partners who cheat report less marital satisfaction.
* Partners who cheat tend to have higher rates of divorce than people who don’t.

Again, I know that a poor marriage may be a reason to get involved outside it. But it works the other way too: messing around makes us less able to love the one we’re with.

**All this comes back to God, the prude.** In light of this research I have come to see God less like a frowning cop with arms crossed looking to squash my pleasure, and more like a coach who has my best interests in mind as he sets out a training schedule. Sure the training requires sacrifice and effort, but the long-term benefits accrue appreciably.

And so I’m okay with God’s stance on sex because in the end I know his *shalom*—that underpinning peace in relating with him, others, and myself. *Shalom* yields pleasure, but goes beyond this smallish emotion to deep contentment.

I see my faith as reasonable and God’s plan making sense in light of science. Faith and facts work together.

804 words