

THE BROAD ROAD IN CHRISTIAN CLOTHING

*False Assurance, Counterfeit Conversion, Normalized Sin,
and the Biblical Marks of Saving Faith*

CHAPTER 7

SEX, DESIRE, IDENTITY, AND THE GOSPEL OF AFFIRMATION

“For this is God’s will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality.”

1 Thessalonians 4:3, CSB

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Chapter 7: Sex, Desire, Identity, and the Gospel of Affirmation

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RESEARCH AND THEOLOGICAL NOTE

Scripture governs the theological claims in this chapter, with Matthew 7:13-23 as the controlling warning against false assurance. The chapter follows the approved architecture of *The Broad Road in Christian Clothing* and redevelops the author's mature work on sexual ethics, created order, false gospels, divorce, and pastoral care without mechanically reproducing earlier prose. Contemporary claims concerning compulsive sexual behavior, pornography, adolescent sexting, trafficking, gender dysphoria and incongruence, pediatric gender services, and differences of sex development were freshly checked against peer-reviewed scholarship and authoritative institutional sources. Clinical classifications and policies are used descriptively and are not treated as moral revelation. Major affirming and traditional interpretations are represented fairly. The chapter rejects coercive change claims, victim-blaming, mockery, abuse concealment, speculative demonology, and the use of intersex conditions as rhetorical props, while also refusing to redefine sexual sin in the name of affirmation. It distinguishes temptation from consent, victimization from guilt, struggle from settled rebellion, diagnosis from moral verdict, and explicit command from principle, wisdom, conscience, and Christian liberty. No human participants were recruited for this chapter; it is a Scripture-governed theological synthesis using secondary sources. Time-sensitive medical and policy claims were last rechecked on 23 August 2026.

Abstract

This chapter examines sexual ethics at the point where contemporary culture most often asks Christianity to exchange repentance for affirmation. Its governing claim is that sexuality is neither a dirty accident to be suppressed nor a sovereign identity entitled to define good and evil. It is a created dimension of embodied human life that belongs under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Scripture presents male and female embodiment, one-flesh marriage, covenant fidelity, chastity, singleness, marital intimacy, and procreation within a moral order that is received from the Creator rather than invented by desire. At the same time, the gospel refuses the opposite counterfeit in which heterosexual respectability, virginity, marriage, fertility, or public moral conservatism becomes a ground of righteousness. Christ alone saves sinners, including sexual sinners, and His grace never needs falsehood in order to be compassionate.

The chapter therefore distinguishes attraction from chosen fantasy, temptation from consent, identity language from moral authority, compulsion from moral vacancy, and victimization from sin. It addresses fornication, cohabitation, hookup culture, adultery, emotional and digital affairs, pornography, compulsive sexual behavior, masturbation, sexting, nude-image abuse, prostitution, trafficking, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality and same-sex relationships, gender identity, gender dysphoria, medical transition, intersex conditions, and the sexual formation of children and adolescents. Major affirming, revisionist, libertarian, therapeutic, and traditional arguments are presented in their strongest serious forms before being tested by Scripture in context. Current clinical and social-science evidence is used carefully where it clarifies compulsive sexual behavior, pornography, adolescent sexting, trafficking, differences of sex development, and contested gender-care policy, without allowing medicine, psychology, politics, or cultural consensus to become the church's final moral authority.

Particular attention is given to pastoral failures on both sides. Churches sin when they mock sexual minorities, blame victims, hide abuse, promise guaranteed orientation change, reduce every struggle to demonic causation, treat women as the guardians of male purity, or make damaged-goods metaphors more powerful than the cleansing of Christ. Churches also fail when they rename what Scripture calls sexual immorality, make consent the only moral criterion, confuse hospitality with doctrinal approval, or reassure persistent rebellion because correction has become culturally costly. The chapter concludes that sexual sin is neither uniquely unforgivable nor spiritually harmless. The sexually ashamed are called out of despair, the sexually presumptuous out of self-justification, and every reader toward repentance, cleansing, accountable discipleship, holiness, assurance in Christ, and readiness for His return.

Keywords: biblical sexuality; sexual ethics; fornication; adultery; pornography; masturbation; divorce; homosexuality; gender identity; intersex; safeguarding; false assurance; repentance; Christian holiness

Introduction: When Desire Is Asked to Name the Self

Sexuality is one of the places where the modern self most quickly turns a feeling into a verdict. A desire is experienced, then narrated as identity, then protected as authenticity, then placed beyond moral contradiction. The sequence can be so culturally familiar that any challenge to it appears not merely restrictive but dehumanizing. If desire tells me who I am, the argument goes, then to question the desire is to reject the person. If affirmation is the highest form of love, then repentance sounds like violence. If consent is present, moral limits seem unnecessary. If an identity feels deep and persistent, denying its authority can seem psychologically impossible and pastorally cruel.

Christian communities have sometimes made this argument easier to believe by their own sins. They have preached against homosexuality while tolerating adultery among leaders. They have shamed unmarried pregnant women while excusing the men who abandoned them. They have told girls that male lust was caused by female bodies. They have treated rape survivors as morally contaminated, pressured abused spouses to remain in danger, covered sexual misconduct to protect ministries, and used the language of purity in ways that made sexual history appear more powerful than the blood of Christ. Some have promised that one prayer, one deliverance session, or one therapeutic technique will erase unwanted sexual attraction. Others have reduced complex psychological or medical distress to rebellion. These failures are not small. They can turn truth into a weapon and make hypocrisy look like orthodoxy.

Yet the abuse of sexual ethics does not abolish sexual ethics. The answer to false condemnation is not false assurance. Jesus did not oppose Pharisaic self-righteousness by declaring the body morally irrelevant. He intensified the moral

demand by reaching the heart. He exposed lust as adultery of the heart, defended the covenant seriousness of marriage, received sexually compromised people with mercy, and called sinners into a transformed life ([Matthew 5:27-32](#); [Matthew 19:3-12](#); [John 4:7-26](#)). Paul likewise refuses both libertinism and contempt for the body. In Corinth, where slogans of appetite and freedom were apparently being used to excuse prostitution, he answers that the body is for the Lord, that sexual union is morally significant, that believers are joined to Christ, and that they were bought at a price ([1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#)). Sexuality is not outside salvation's reach because the body is not outside Christ's lordship.

The previous chapter developed that theology of embodiment. This chapter narrows the focus from the body generally to sex, desire, identity, covenant, and the increasingly influential claim that Christian love requires moral affirmation. The transition matters. Chapter 6 rejected both bodily autonomy and religious body-policing. Chapter 7 must now ask what bodily union means, what desires may rightly command obedience, how identity should be understood, how Christians should respond to sexual suffering and sin, and where pastoral compassion becomes a counterfeit gospel if it asks God to bless what His Word calls us to renounce. The following chapter will turn to pleasures and appetites more broadly. The present chapter therefore stays concentrated on sexuality rather than turning into a general catalogue of entertainment or indulgence.

The author's prior work has already developed several foundations that should be retained and advanced. The Gospel According to the Age located contemporary sexual revision within a wider shift from received creatureliness toward the sovereign self, while its treatment of the sexual revolution insisted that compassion must not be confused with the redefinition of moral truth (Sangwa, 2026a). The same work also warned against a simplistic conspiracy narrative: changes in sexual ethics are better understood as a convergence of philosophical individualism, legal change, market incentives, therapeutic categories, digital media, family breakdown, institutional activism, and genuine reactions against past injustice. The author's later practical-theological research on divorce likewise found that marital breakdown cannot be reduced to one cause. Economic strain, intimate partner violence, changing expectations of intimacy, digital media, weak pastoral formation, and social transition interact in complex ways, while churches often underinvest in premarital formation, safeguarding, conflict intervention, and post-crisis care (Sangwa et al., 2026). The present chapter builds on those mature conclusions rather than repeating older claims that cannot bear fresh scrutiny.

A Christian doctrine of sexuality must begin with a distinction that modern debate repeatedly collapses: dignity is unconditional; moral approval is not. Every human being bears God's image and deserves protection from violence, ridicule, coercion, discrimination, exploitation, and contempt. Nothing in this chapter should be read as permission to mistreat a person because of sexual history, orientation, gender distress, marital status, infertility, or any other vulnerability. But image-bearing dignity does not mean that every desire, behavior, relationship, or identity claim is morally equivalent. Scripture dignifies people precisely by addressing them as creatures capable of truth, repentance, covenant, obedience, forgiveness, and holiness.

The strongest contemporary defense of affirmation deserves to be heard. It says that traditional sexual teaching has often produced shame, family rejection, depression, secrecy, and exclusion; that same-sex couples can display fidelity and mutual care; that transgender people may experience severe dysphoria; that modern knowledge of sexual orientation and gender was unavailable to biblical writers; that ancient same-sex practices were frequently exploitative or status-based; that the church has changed its mind on other moral and social questions; and that a gospel centered on mercy should not impose celibacy or bodily congruence on people whose experiences do not fit majority patterns. More broadly, libertarian sexual ethics argue that informed adult consent, honesty, and non-harm should be sufficient. Therapeutic ethics add that a practice that promotes psychological congruence or reduces distress may be morally preferable to a rule that intensifies shame.

Those arguments raise real questions. Christians should not answer them with slogans. Consent matters because coercion is evil. Harm matters because love does not injure the neighbor. Psychological suffering matters because the church must not treat distress as unreal. Historical context matters because Scripture must be interpreted rather than weaponized. Fidelity matters because promiscuity and exploitation are not equivalent to covenantal devotion. The church's failures matter because hypocrisy can obscure the truth it professes.

But none of those considerations is sufficient to define sexual morality. Consent cannot make adultery faithful when two married people consent to betray their spouses. Mutual affection cannot make incest righteous. Psychological relief cannot turn every desired act into a good act. Longevity cannot by itself sanctify a relationship. Legal recognition cannot determine what God blesses. Sincerity cannot convert desire into revelation. In biblical ethics, the decisive question is not only whether persons consent but whether their conduct accords with the Creator's good order and the lordship of Christ.

This is also why sexual desire must not be treated as uniquely authoritative. Christians do not reason, "I experience greed deeply, therefore greed reveals my true self," or "my anger is persistent, therefore anger must be morally affirmed." Sexual desire differs from greed or anger in important ways. It is connected to bonding, family, embodiment, intimacy, procreation, and powerful experiences of attachment. But its depth does not make it infallible. After the fall, all human desires exist within a condition of disordered love. Some desires are good, some are distorted

forms of good desires, some are morally indifferent until directed, and some entice toward what God forbids. The presence of desire tells us that desire is present. It does not settle the moral question.

The chapter must therefore distinguish five categories with unusual care. First, temptation is not identical to sin. Jesus was tempted yet without sin ([Hebrews 4:15](#)). Unwanted sexual attraction or an intrusive thought is not morally equivalent to chosen fantasy or action. Second, victimization is not sexual sin. A person who is raped, abused, coerced, trafficked, groomed, or exposed to sexual material against his or her will does not become guilty for what another person did. Third, compulsion can diminish freedom and intensify the need for clinical as well as pastoral care without turning every act into a morally neutral reflex. Contemporary diagnostic frameworks for compulsive sexual behavior explicitly distinguish persistent failure of control with serious impairment from high sexual interest or distress caused only by moral disapproval (Kraus et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 2024). Fourth, identity language can describe experience without necessarily becoming a moral creed, yet every identity claim must remain subordinate to the believer's union with Christ. Fifth, repentance is not self-hatred. It is the grace-enabled turning by which the sinner stops asking God to rename darkness and comes into the light because mercy is real.

The church also needs to reject counterfeit sexual spiritualities. Some New Age and neo-Tantric appropriations treat sexual energy as a route to awakening, expanded consciousness, “divine masculine” and “divine feminine” integration, or sacred self-realization. New Thought and manifestation cultures may frame romantic desire as an energetic law by which the right partner, “twin flame,” or soulmate is summoned. Christianized variants can baptize these claims with words such as destiny, prophetic confirmation, or “God told me you are my spouse.” Historical Tantra is diverse and cannot responsibly be reduced to Western sexualized caricatures, but modern esoteric appropriations have repeatedly recast sexuality as a technology of self-transcendence (Hanegraaff, 1996; Urban, 2003). Scripture gives no permission to treat erotic intensity as revelation. Desire is not prophecy, orgasm is not sacrament, and romantic obsession is not the voice of the Holy Spirit.

A related popular teaching speaks of “sexual soul ties” as invisible spiritual cords, transferred fragments of persons, or demonic bonds requiring specialized deliverance. Scripture certainly treats sexual union as morally and relationally consequential. Paul can quote the one-flesh language even in warning against union with a prostitute ([1 Corinthians 6:16](#)). But the text does not teach that sexual partners exchange detachable soul pieces, genetic memories, or demons that can only be removed by a formula. Past sexual sin may leave memories, habits, trauma, relational consequences, disease, pregnancy, attachment, guilt, or spiritual temptation. Those realities can be serious. They do not require speculative metaphysics. The gospel provides confession, forgiveness, wisdom, community, therapy where appropriate, and sanctification without inventing mechanisms Scripture never reveals.

The governing thesis, then, is both stricter and more hopeful than the competing gospels. The gospel of affirmation says, in effect, “You are safe when your deepest desire is validated.” Purity legalism says, “You are safe when your sexual record is clean enough.” The gospel of Jesus Christ says neither. We are justified by grace through faith in Christ, not by virginity, heterosexuality, marriage, celibacy, or sexual success. Yet the same Christ who justifies claims our bodies and desires for holiness. He does not tell the promiscuous sinner, the adulterer, the porn user, the same-sex attracted believer, the divorced person, the gender-distressed teenager, the sexually wounded survivor, or the self-righteous church member the same pastoral sentence, because their situations are not the same. He does, however, summon every one of them to Himself.

That summons is urgent but not sensational. Sexual ethics belongs inside discipleship and eschatological readiness because the New Testament repeatedly joins holiness with watchfulness. Paul calls believers to abstain from sexual immorality and learn to control their bodies in holiness and honor, then soon turns to the coming of the Lord and the call to remain awake ([1 Thessalonians 4:1-8](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11](#)). Readiness does not mean panic about cultural change. It means refusing to make peace with any sin because the Bridegroom is coming and His people belong to Him.

7.1 God's Design for Sexuality

A Christian sexual ethic begins not with prohibition but with gift. Genesis does not introduce sexuality as an embarrassment that holiness later restrains. God creates humanity male and female in His image, blesses them, commands fruitfulness, and calls the created order very good ([Genesis 1:26-31](#)). Genesis 2 then presents marriage as a covenantal one-flesh union in which a man leaves father and mother, holds fast to his wife, and the two become one flesh ([Genesis 2:18-25](#)). Jesus receives this creation pattern rather than treating it as an obsolete local custom. When questioned about divorce, He joins Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 and speaks of male and female, leaving, cleaving, one flesh, and God's joining action ([Matthew 19:4-6](#)).

Several elements belong together. Sexuality is embodied. It is relational. It is capable of procreation. It is covenantal rather than merely recreational. It is ordered toward a union in which sexual difference is not an accident but part of the created form of marriage. It is also pleasurable. Scripture can celebrate marital delight without embarrassment.

Proverbs calls a husband to rejoice in the wife of his youth ([Proverbs 5:18-19](#)), and the Song of Songs gives poetic voice to mutual desire, beauty, longing, and delight within a literary world that refuses the idea that holiness requires erotic numbness. Paul likewise treats marital sexual intimacy as mutual rather than a unilateral male entitlement, insisting that husband and wife each owe conjugal care to the other and that neither body is a license for coercion because both belong within a reciprocal covenant ([1 Corinthians 7:3-5](#)).

Procreation belongs to the design but does not exhaust it. The command to be fruitful establishes the generative horizon of male-female union, and children are repeatedly treated as gifts rather than consumer accessories ([Genesis 1:28](#); [Psalm 127:3-5](#)). Yet Scripture does not teach that every marital act must result in conception or that infertile marriages are incomplete covenants. Marriage includes companionship, mutual help, faithfulness, sexual exclusivity, and a public joining of lives. A couple who cannot conceive remains genuinely married. Infertility can be a profound grief, but it is not proof of divine rejection.

The strongest modern objection is that this creation account may describe an ancient majority pattern without prescribing an exclusive norm. Male and female, it is argued, may be a merism describing humanity without excluding other identities; Genesis 2 may explain heterosexual marriage without declaring that no other covenantal sexual union can be blessed. Supporters of same-sex marriage often add that biblical texts address exploitative, idolatrous, pederastic, or patriarchal same-sex behavior rather than modern egalitarian marriages, and that the moral logic of fidelity, mutuality, and covenant should be extended beyond the ancient form (Brownson, 2013; Hays & Hays, 2024).

That argument deserves more than the reply “Genesis says Adam and Eve.” The question is how the creation texts function canonically. Jesus does not merely cite an example. He appeals to the Creator’s action “from the beginning” as the normative ground for marital permanence. Paul likewise draws on the one-flesh pattern when addressing prostitution and sexual morality ([1 Corinthians 6:15-20](#)) and on creation when speaking about the relation of men and women in other ecclesial questions. The New Testament can affirm singleness as an honorable calling and thereby show that marriage is not necessary for full humanity ([Matthew 19:10-12](#); [1 Corinthians 7:7-8](#), [1 Corinthians 7:32-35](#)). What it never does is positively redefine marriage as a sexual covenant independent of male-female union. The absence is not decisive by itself, but the positive pattern is consistent from creation through Jesus and apostolic teaching.

Consensual non-monogamy and so-called open marriage require separate attention. Their strongest defense is that honesty and adult consent are preferable to secret adultery and that no spouse is deceived. That observation correctly condemns deception, but it does not settle the Christian definition of fidelity. In Scripture, marital faithfulness is not created merely by disclosure. The creation formula is two becoming one flesh ([Genesis 2:24](#); [Matthew 19:5-6](#)); Paul’s ordinary marital pattern speaks of each man having his own wife and each woman her own husband ([1 Corinthians 7:2](#)); and the marriage bed is to be kept undefiled ([Hebrews 13:4](#)). Scripture records plural marriages, but narrative description is not moral endorsement. The biblical storyline repeatedly displays rivalry and disorder around them, while Jesus returns to the creation pattern rather than expanding it. An “open” marriage may therefore remove secrecy and still violate covenantal exclusivity. Consent can remove deception; it cannot turn fidelity into an optional preference.

Chastity is therefore not a punishment imposed on sexual minorities. It is the Christian name for sexual integrity under one’s actual vocation. Married Christians are called to sexual exclusivity within marriage. Unmarried Christians, whether heterosexual or same-sex attracted, are called to abstinence from sexual union. Widows, widowers, divorced persons who are not free to remarry under their understanding of Scripture, engaged couples, adolescents, priests in celibate traditions, single adults, and spouses separated by travel or illness may all face forms of costly restraint. The cost is not evenly distributed, and the church must not pretend otherwise. Some people experience persistent desires for a form of intimacy Scripture does not authorize. Their burden deserves serious companionship, not the dismissive sentence “just be celibate.” But difficulty cannot be made the test of truth. Jesus Himself speaks of costly renunciation for the kingdom ([Matthew 19:12](#)), and Paul treats unmarried devotion as a potentially fruitful Christian vocation, not a defective waiting room ([1 Corinthians 7:25-35](#)).

Marriage must also be rescued from idolatry. Conservative churches can preach a true definition of marriage while creating false assurance around married status. A man may have a wife and children and still be an adulterer in practice, a porn user in secret, a coercive husband, a liar, or a hypocrite. A woman may defend biblical marriage and still weaponize sex, practice contempt, cultivate emotional infidelity, or worship family reputation. Churches can treat singles as incomplete and childless couples as spiritually suspect. None of this follows from Genesis. Marriage is a creation gift, not a savior.

The moral classification is therefore clear at the foundation. The one-flesh covenant of marriage as the proper context for sexual intercourse is an enduring biblical norm, not merely a matter of private conscience. Fidelity within marriage and chastity outside it are moral obligations. The precise cultural form of courtship, wedding ceremony, household organization, frequency of marital intimacy, and many questions of family planning involve wisdom, conscience, and legitimate difference. Christians must not convert one culture’s dating customs, bride-price practices, wedding expenses, or gender stereotypes into universal revelation.

This framework also exposes New Age and therapeutic counterfeits without demonizing legitimate therapy. Sexuality can be used in some contemporary spiritual systems as a means of self-deification, energy manipulation, or transcendence. Biblical sexuality moves in the opposite direction. It teaches creaturely reception. The body is not a portal through which the self becomes divine. Marriage is not the fusion of cosmic energies. Sexual climax is not evidence of spiritual awakening. The Christian receives marital intimacy with thanksgiving as a creature before the Creator, bounded by covenant and love.

The first self-examination is therefore not, “Am I sexually fulfilled?” It is, “Have I allowed God to define the good?” If married, do I treat my spouse as a covenant partner or an instrument for appetite, status, reproduction, or emotional regulation? If single, do I believe that Christ can give a full human life without sexual possession? If I am sexually attracted in ways I did not choose, do I assume that the depth of attraction makes it morally sovereign? If I teach sexual ethics, do I hold married heterosexual sinners to the same standard of repentance I demand from others? God’s design is not permission for self-righteousness. It is a gift that exposes every one of us to the lordship of Christ.

7.2 Sexual Desire, Temptation, and Moral Responsibility

Desire is morally complex because people do not choose every desire that appears. A teenager may experience sexual arousal before possessing mature categories for it. A married person may notice someone attractive without intending infidelity. A same-sex attracted person may experience attraction that feels persistent and unbidden. A survivor may experience involuntary bodily responses connected to trauma. A person with obsessive-compulsive symptoms may suffer intrusive sexual thoughts that are profoundly unwanted. A person with compulsive sexual behavior may experience powerful urges reinforced by habit, anxiety, loneliness, or digital availability. If every involuntary internal event is labeled chosen sin, the church will crush consciences Scripture does not crush.

Jesus’ temptation is decisive for the basic distinction. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin ([Hebrews 4:15](#)). Therefore temptation cannot be identical with sin. James describes a sequence in which desire entices and, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin ([James 1:14-15](#)). The metaphor should not be over-psychologized, but it supports a distinction between the presence of temptation and the will’s embrace of it. Moral responsibility becomes clearer when attention, consent, imagination, intention, and action enter the process.

At the same time, Christians should not use the temptation distinction to pretend that inner life is morally irrelevant. Jesus says that the man who looks at a woman in order to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart ([Matthew 5:27-30](#)). The grammar concerns a look ordered toward coveting, not the mere perception that another person is attractive. The difference matters. Attraction can arise. Chosen fantasy feeds it. A thought can intrude. The will can entertain it, return to it, construct scenes around it, and use another person’s image for private gratification. Holiness reaches the imagination because love reaches the imagination.

Identity adds another layer. Modern psychology properly distinguishes sexual attraction, sexual behavior, and identity labels because they do not always coincide (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020). A person may experience same-sex attraction but identify according to religious conviction rather than sexual orientation. Another may use “gay” descriptively while committing to celibacy. Another may adopt an identity as a moral and political claim that treats the orientation as constitutive of the self and its expression as a right. Those situations should not be collapsed.

Christian discipleship gives ultimate identity a christological center. Believers are “in Christ,” adopted, sanctified, members of His body, and citizens of His kingdom ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#); [Galatians 3:26-29](#); [Colossians 3:1-11](#)). This does not erase secondary descriptions. A Christian can still be Rwandan, widowed, disabled, male, female, a teacher, a farmer, or someone who experiences same-sex attraction. The theological danger begins when a secondary description becomes a sovereign norm: “Because this desire is mine, God must bless its expression.” Identity language can be pastorally wise or unwise depending on what it means. Scripture gives no warrant for treating one contested English label as the dividing line between salvation and apostasy.

Bisexuality and asexuality further show why orientation language must describe experience without becoming the measure of human worth or the source of moral law. A person who experiences attraction to both sexes does not thereby receive a different ethic from other Christians: marital fidelity and unmarried chastity still govern sexual conduct. A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction is not spiritually defective, emotionally incomplete, or required to manufacture desire in order to become fully human. Jesus and Paul both make room for honorable unmarried life and kingdom-focused singleness ([Matthew 19:10-12](#); [1 Corinthians 7:7-8](#)). The church should therefore neither enthrone sexual desire nor make its presence a requirement for adulthood. Christ, not libido, defines the completeness of the disciple.

Consent is likewise necessary but insufficient. Sexual assault, rape, coercion, grooming, blackmail, abuse of authority, trafficking, and sex with a person unable to consent are grave violations precisely because they deny the neighbor’s agency and dignity. Christian teaching that minimizes consent is morally defective. Marriage does not grant a spouse

limitless sexual access. Paul's language of mutuality in [1 Corinthians 7:3-5](#) cannot be turned into a weapon for marital rape. The command not to deprive one another is embedded in reciprocal self-giving and prayer, not coercive entitlement. A frightened "yes," a manipulated "yes," or a "yes" extracted through spiritual authority may not be meaningful consent at all.

Yet two consenting adults can still sin. Adultery can be consensual. Commercial sex can be consensual and still contradict chastity, while sometimes also being shaped by economic desperation. Pornography can be produced through nominal consent yet still form the viewer in lust and commodify bodies. Sexual acts within an unmarried relationship can be affectionate and consensual while remaining outside the covenant Scripture establishes for sex. Consent answers the question, "Was this person forced?" It does not answer the whole question, "Is this holy?"

Compulsion must be handled with the same precision. The World Health Organization's ICD-11 recognizes compulsive sexual behavior disorder as an impulse-control disorder characterized by a persistent pattern of failure to control intense, repetitive sexual impulses or urges resulting in repetitive behavior and significant impairment. Importantly, the diagnostic guidance warns against diagnosing people simply because they have a high level of sexual interest or because they feel distress that is entirely related to moral judgments or disapproval (Kraus et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 2024). This is a useful safeguard for churches. Not every porn user has an addiction. Not every person who masturbates compulsively can simply stop by being told to "try harder." Not every intense desire is a disorder.

Clinical complexity, however, does not abolish moral agency. A compulsive pattern may reduce practical freedom, intensify craving, and require professional treatment, environmental controls, accountability, sleep and stress interventions, medication for comorbid conditions, or specialized psychotherapy. It can also involve acts for which the person remains responsible, especially deception, coercion, infidelity, financial misuse, or illegal behavior. Christian care must reject two equally shallow sentences: "It is only sin, so therapy is unbelief," and "It is only a disorder, so repentance is irrelevant." Some people need both confession and treatment.

The same balance applies to spiritual warfare. Scripture teaches that believers struggle against spiritual powers and must resist the devil ([Ephesians 6:10-18](#); [James 4:7-8](#)). But the Bible does not teach that every sexual temptation is caused by a "spirit of lust," a "spiritual spouse," ancestral sex demon, or transferred curse. Such claims can become spiritually abusive when leaders claim secret knowledge, conduct humiliating deliverance sessions, touch bodies inappropriately, or blame ongoing temptation on insufficient faith. Spiritual warfare is real. Speculation is not revelation.

Desire is also formed. Algorithms, pornography, advertising, peer cultures, fantasies, repeated behavior, family models, trauma, loneliness, and habits of attention can shape what becomes salient and rewarding. This does not mean every orientation or sexual pattern is simply chosen. Human development is more complex. It does mean discipleship should not accept the modern fiction that desire arrives untouched by formation. Paul tells believers to be transformed by the renewing of the mind and to put sinful patterns to death ([Romans 12:1-2](#); [Colossians 3:5-10](#)). Grace does not require a theory explaining the origin of every desire before teaching the believer how to respond to it.

The moral classification here is layered. Unchosen attraction and temptation are not themselves explicit moral violations. Chosen lust, sexual immorality, adultery, exploitation, and deceit are prohibited. Strategies for managing temptation, such as device limits, accountability, avoiding certain environments, changing travel arrangements, or declining private meetings, often belong to wisdom. Some strict boundaries may be wise for one person and unnecessary for another. They should not be universalized as if every man and woman who speaks privately is committing sin.

Self-examination must therefore move from "What do I feel?" to "What do I do with what I feel?" Do I feed the fantasy because I have decided desire deserves obedience? Do I call a pattern involuntary when I have built an environment designed to sustain it? Do I call someone "tempting me" because I refuse responsibility for my own gaze? Do I mistake intrusive thoughts for consent and torment myself with false guilt? Do I refuse clinical help because I fear it would make my struggle seem less spiritual? Do I use a diagnosis to hide from restitution? Christ knows the difference between the bruised conscience and the protected idol. His truth is precise enough to confront both.

7.3 Fornication, Cohabitation, and Hookup Culture

The New Testament's sexual ethic assumes that sexual intercourse belongs within marriage. Paul repeatedly uses the broad term *porneia* for sexual immorality and contrasts it with the sanctified use of the body. In [1 Thessalonians 4:3-8](#), he calls abstention from sexual immorality part of God's will for sanctification. In [1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#), he rejects prostitution not only because it may involve exploitation but because sexual union itself creates a one-body relation inconsistent with belonging to Christ. In [1 Corinthians 7:1-9](#), he treats marriage as the proper covenantal context for sexual relations in a community struggling with both immorality and asceticism. The text does not present premarital sex as a morally neutral stage on the way to marriage.

“Fornication” can sound archaic, and the term has sometimes been used so loosely that it becomes a synonym for any behavior conservative Christians dislike. Precision matters. The English word traditionally refers to consensual sexual intercourse between unmarried people. The Greek *porneia* is broader and context-dependent, capable of covering multiple forms of illicit sexual conduct (Loader, 2012). It should not be used to smuggle every prudential dating rule into an explicit biblical prohibition. Kissing, holding hands, sharing a meal, traveling together, or spending time alone do not become “fornication” merely because a local church disapproves. Sexual intercourse outside marriage, however, stands squarely within the New Testament’s prohibition of sexual immorality.

The strongest defense of premarital sex is usually relational rather than hedonistic. A couple may say, “We love each other, intend to marry, are exclusive, and need to know whether we are sexually compatible.” Others point out that modern marriage occurs later than in many biblical societies, while sexual maturation occurs earlier, creating a long period of restraint that ancient communities did not face in the same way. Some argue that legal marriage is a state construct and that committed cohabitation may function as marriage in substance. Hookup culture makes a different case: consenting adults can enjoy sex without pretending every encounter carries covenantal meaning, provided communication and safety are present.

Those arguments identify real cultural changes, but they do not change the moral structure of one-flesh union. Intention to marry is not marriage. Engagement can be a solemn promise, but it is still a promise about a covenant not yet entered. Scripture recognizes betrothal as morally serious and can call sexual unfaithfulness during it adultery-like betrayal, yet betrothal and completed marriage remain distinguishable ([Matthew 1:18-25](#)). The claim “we are basically married” often functions precisely to receive marital privileges without public covenantal accountability.

The idea of “sexual compatibility” also requires scrutiny. Sexual relationships involve communication, health, expectation, maturity, patience, trauma history, libido differences, fertility decisions, and changing bodies. Marriage does not guarantee effortless compatibility, and premarital sexual experimentation does not guarantee durable intimacy. A test-drive model can train couples to evaluate each other as products. Christian marriage asks a different question: can two people enter a faithful covenant and learn mutual self-giving over a lifetime? This does not mean sexual concerns should be ignored. Premarital counseling can address expectations, prior trauma, pornography, sexual pain, medical conditions, infertility concerns, boundaries, consent, and communication without requiring the couple to have intercourse first.

Cohabitation is more complicated because living under one roof is not itself a sexual act. Two unmarried adults may share housing for economic reasons without sexual involvement. Extended families may live together. Refugees, students, caregivers, and people in housing crises may have arrangements that do not fit middle-class assumptions. Scripture does not contain a universal command that an unmarried man and woman may never share an address. Therefore the church should not call the address itself fornication.

When cohabitation is a domestic partnership that includes sexual intimacy and functions as a substitute for marriage, however, the moral issue is clearer. The problem is not that the couple lacks an expensive wedding. Christian marriage does not require luxury. The problem is that sexual and domestic union has been detached from the public covenant Scripture recognizes as marriage. Where legal barriers, war, displacement, poverty, or unjust systems make civil formalization unusually difficult, pastors may need careful contextual judgment about what constitutes public covenantal commitment. That exceptional complexity must not be used to erase the ordinary distinction between cohabiting partnership and marriage.

Hookup culture makes the anti-covenantal logic explicit. Sex becomes an experience that may be separated from enduring responsibility, public promise, or future orientation. The culture can appeal to autonomy and honesty: better, it says, to have consensual sex without false promises than to marry hypocritically. There is truth in the critique of hypocrisy. A wedding ring does not sanctify selfish sex. Married people can use each other. But removing the promise does not solve the problem of use. It can normalize a sexual imagination in which another person’s body is temporarily available without the comprehensive covenant that sex symbolically and biologically evokes.

Serial relationships can reproduce the same pattern in more respectable form. A Christian may avoid casual hookups yet repeatedly form intense pseudo-marriages, become sexually involved, break apart, and begin again while treating each cycle as “discernment.” The heart can become trained in covenant rehearsal without covenant permanence. Grace is available after failure, but grace should not be used to make repetition spiritually uninteresting.

Popular Christian teaching can create a different distortion through “purity culture.” Virginity may be treated as a spiritual commodity that makes one person more valuable than another. Young women in particular have sometimes been told that premarital sex makes them like used tape, chewed gum, or damaged goods. Those metaphors are theologically cruel. A rape survivor did not lose purity by being violated. A repentant fornicator is not permanently second-class. A virgin can be proud, lustful, manipulative, and unregenerate. Sexual history matters, sometimes with lifelong consequences, but it does not determine worth or place a sinner beyond cleansing. Paul can say to a church containing people with serious sexual histories, “And some of you used to be like this. But you were washed” ([1 Corinthians 6:11](#)).

Christian dating is therefore a matter of disciplined wisdom rather than a revealed one-size-fits-all system. Scripture does not command modern dating, courtship, arranged marriage, a particular age gap, a prescribed number of months, chaperones for every conversation, or the rule that a couple may never be alone. It does command holiness, truthfulness, self-control, honor, wisdom, and avoidance of sexual immorality. A wise couple will ask what environments increase temptation, what accountability helps without becoming surveillance, whether the relationship is moving toward honest discernment rather than indefinite pseudo-marriage, whether faith is genuinely shared, and whether warning signs of manipulation or abuse are being ignored.

A Christian also cannot baptize romantic obsession as divine guidance. “God told me you are my husband,” “the Spirit showed me you are my wife,” “we are twin flames,” or “our sexual connection proves destiny” can become forms of coercion. Scripture gives no believer revelatory ownership over another person’s future. Marriage requires free, truthful covenantal consent. The Holy Spirit does not need manipulation.

The gospel response to premarital sexual sin is neither trivialization nor exile. Couples who are sexually involved should not be told that marriage is a ritual that automatically cleanses ongoing dysfunction. They should repent, establish boundaries, seek counsel, address coercion or dependency, and discern marriage responsibly. Some should marry. Some should end relationships that are unsafe or spiritually destructive. A pregnancy does not make the child a punishment, and it does not force two incompatible or abusive people into marriage. The child is to be protected and loved. The parents’ sin, if there was sin, should be addressed without transferring shame onto the child.

The searching question is not merely, “Have I crossed a technical line?” It is, “Am I training my body to tell the truth about covenant?” If I call myself engaged, have I used the future wedding to justify present disobedience? If I cohabit, is the arrangement truly nonsexual and necessary, or am I using ambiguity to avoid the word Scripture would use? If I date, do I treat another person’s heart and body as material for my self-discovery? Holiness is not fear of sex. It is sex received under truth.

7.4 Adultery and Emotional Affairs

Adultery is covenant treachery. Scripture’s prohibition is explicit ([Exodus 20:14](#)), and Jesus deepens rather than relaxes it. He identifies chosen lust as heart-adultery and treats casual divorce for the purpose of another union as morally serious ([Matthew 5:27-32](#)). Adultery is therefore not merely a private sexual mistake. It violates vows, deceives a spouse, destabilizes trust, and often harms children, extended families, churches, and communities.

The modern form of adultery is not always physical at first. Digital communication has created environments in which intimacy can grow privately and continuously. A colleague becomes the person who hears what one’s spouse no longer hears. Secret messages become emotionally charged. Complaints about the marriage create a bond with an outsider. Flirtation is dismissed as harmless because no one has touched. Photos, disappearing messages, late-night calls, private travel, and emotional dependency form an alternative relational world. By the time sexual contact occurs, a covenant may already have been betrayed in imagination, loyalty, secrecy, and comparison.

The phrase “emotional affair” is not a biblical technical term, and it should not be weaponized against every close friendship. Christians are not required to live in gender-segregated fear. Men and women can work together, study together, serve together, counsel appropriately, and form honorable friendships. Jesus interacted with women publicly and respectfully in a culture where such interactions could be scrutinized ([John 4:7-27](#); [Luke 10:38-42](#)). The answer to adultery is not suspicion of half the human race.

The moral question is whether a relationship is taking on functions, secrecy, erotic energy, or covenantal displacement that rightly belong elsewhere. Does the spouse know about the relationship? Is the communication hidden because disclosure would reveal its character? Is emotional energy being transferred away from the marriage into a relationship maintained by fantasy? Is one person enjoying the intoxication of being desired while insisting nothing is happening? Is the workplace relationship being protected at the expense of marital trust? These questions move beyond a simplistic rule such as “never have lunch with someone of the opposite sex” and reach the actual condition of the heart.

Workplaces create particular risks because proximity, shared pressure, travel, admiration, and professional collaboration can generate intimacy. Pastors, counselors, professors, physicians, and ministry leaders carry additional power asymmetries. A relationship may feel “mutual” while one person controls grades, employment, spiritual standing, money, or access. Consent in such contexts can be ethically compromised even if not legally absent. Leaders who exploit pastoral counseling or spiritual authority for sexual access commit not only sexual sin but abuse of entrusted power ([Ezekiel 34:1-10](#); [1 Peter 5:1-4](#)).

The strongest defense of emotional relationships outside marriage often appeals to marital deprivation. “My spouse does not understand me.” “We have had no intimacy for years.” “I finally found someone who sees me.” These statements may describe real loneliness, neglect, or even abuse. They deserve response, not mockery. But another person’s failure does not create a secret moral license. Where a marriage is unsafe, separation and professional

intervention may be necessary. Where there is chronic neglect, serious counseling and pastoral action may be needed. Adultery is not a treatment plan for a wounded marriage.

A different defense appeals to destiny. Some contemporary spirituality frames intense attraction as a soulmate bond, twin-flame recognition, karmic reunion, or sign that the universe has revealed one's "true" partner. Christianized versions substitute "God told me." Such claims can be especially destructive when one or both persons are married. Scripture does not teach that erotic intensity can nullify covenant. The God who commands faithfulness does not contradict His revealed will by private revelation. A "prophecy" that authorizes adultery has failed the biblical test before its emotional power is considered ([Deuteronomy 13:1-4](#); [1 John 4:1](#)).

Restoration after adultery requires more than exposure and apology. Repentance means ending the affair, telling the truth, accepting consequences, addressing deception, establishing boundaries, seeking accountability, and making restitution where possible. Reconciliation may be possible and beautiful, but it cannot be demanded from the betrayed spouse as proof of spirituality. Forgiveness and restored trust are related but not identical. Forgiveness may begin as obedience before emotions heal; trust is rebuilt through demonstrated truthfulness over time. A spouse who has been betrayed may need trauma-informed counseling. If abuse, coercion, or threats are present, safety takes priority over preserving appearances.

Churches must also repent of institutional adultery coverups. When a leader's affair is renamed "moral failure" while the subordinate participant is blamed, or when rapid restoration to ministry is prioritized over the betrayed family and congregation, the church has protected a brand rather than holiness. The qualifications for leadership include tested character and reputation ([1 Timothy 3:1-7](#); [Titus 1:5-9](#)). Forgiveness is available to fallen leaders. Restoration to fellowship and restoration to office are not automatically the same timeline or outcome.

There is also conservative hypocrisy to expose. A person can denounce same-sex relationships publicly while maintaining a mistress privately. A politician can campaign on family values while purchasing sex. A pastor can preach modesty while sexually grooming counselees. A church can discipline a pregnant teenager while hiding an elder's adultery. Such double standards do not make the biblical sexual ethic false. They reveal how urgently the church itself needs to live beneath it.

The moral classification is direct. Adultery, lustful cultivation, sexual exploitation, and deceit are prohibited. Many specific relational boundaries are wisdom, not universal law. One spouse may reasonably request stronger transparency after betrayal than another marriage requires. A pastor may need stricter communication protocols because of power and confidentiality. Christians should not confuse wise fences with the command itself.

Self-examination therefore asks: what relationship do I protect from my spouse's sight? Whose messages do I delete? Whose praise do I crave? Have I built an emotional refuge with someone else because I resent the work of marital repair? Do I call flirtation "personality" because I enjoy the attention? Have I used ministry, business travel, counseling, or spiritual language to approach someone who trusts my authority? Adultery rarely begins with a hotel room. It often begins when the heart decides secrecy is entitled to survive.

7.5 Pornography and the Sexualization of the Imagination

Pornography is often defended as fantasy rather than infidelity. The viewer does not physically touch a performer, the content may be legal, and some performers describe participation as chosen work. Couples may even consume pornography together and call it a private enhancement. In a digital economy where explicit material is available through mainstream social platforms, dedicated websites, messaging applications, subscription services, live streams, virtual reality, and synthetic media, pornography can be made to look like one more form of entertainment. The strongest defense therefore asks why consensually produced images viewed in private should be treated as a moral crisis.

The Christian answer begins before the industrial questions. Jesus locates sexual unfaithfulness in the heart when a person looks in order to lust ([Matthew 5:27-30](#)). Pornography is organized precisely around such looking. The user does not accidentally notice beauty. The material is selected, replayed, purchased, searched, or generated in order to create erotic arousal through persons who are not the viewer's spouse. That places ordinary pornography use within the moral logic of lust even before questions of exploitation are considered.

This is why pornography cannot be made morally safe merely by proving that a particular performer consented. Consent remains important. Nonconsensual imagery, hidden cameras, child sexual abuse material, coerced performance, revenge pornography, trafficking, and deceptive production add grave forms of victimization. But a sexual ethic built only on consent cannot explain why an apparently voluntary commercial performance should still be resisted by a Christian viewer. Scripture's concern is not only whether the performer was forced. It is also what the viewer is doing with another person's body in imagination.

Pornography trains attention toward consumption. It turns a person into content selected according to preference, novelty, category, and intensity. The platform architecture can deepen this process through recommendation systems,

endless supply, escalating novelty, and personalization. The Christian concern is not that every user will follow an identical neurological pathway or that science has proven a single deterministic “brain damage” story. Claims about pornography’s psychological effects are more complex than popular preaching often suggests. Research links problematic use with distress and relational difficulties in some populations, but causality, selection effects, frequency, moral incongruence, and individual differences matter. Contemporary clinical literature therefore urges careful assessment rather than assuming that all pornography use is an addiction or that all distress has the same cause (Kraus et al., 2018; Grubbs et al., 2019; Ince et al., 2026).

That caution strengthens rather than weakens moral clarity. Christians do not need to prove that every sin produces a diagnosable disorder before calling it sin. Greed is not righteous when it fails to meet psychiatric criteria. Lust is not morally neutral until a clinician labels it compulsive. At the same time, churches should stop using the word “addiction” as a dramatic synonym for repeated behavior. Some users have a habit reinforced by secrecy and opportunity. Some have compulsive sexual behavior with substantial impairment. Some use pornography episodically. Some experience distress primarily because use contradicts conscience. Pastoral care should know the difference.

Where compulsive patterns exist, repentance may require more than sincere promises. A person may need device restrictions, financial transparency, changed sleep routines, removal of private access points, psychotherapy, treatment of depression or anxiety, peer support, marital counseling, and long-term accountability. The aim is not surveillance as a permanent substitute for virtue. It is to make obedience practical while habits are being retrained. Jesus’ severe language about removing occasions of sin ([Matthew 5:29-30](#)) should not be literalized into bodily harm, but it does destroy the fantasy that serious repentance never costs convenience.

Subscription sexual platforms introduce another moral problem because they can intensify parasocial intimacy. The purchaser may communicate directly with a creator, request custom content, send gifts, and experience the transaction as personalized. A spouse may insist, “It is only online,” while spending family money and sexual attention on an ongoing digital relationship. The lack of physical contact does not make secrecy faithful. Financial betrayal can compound sexual betrayal.

Synthetic sexual media adds a newer layer. Deepfakes and generative systems can create explicit images of real people without consent or fabricate entirely synthetic figures. The absence of a human performer may remove some forms of direct exploitation, but it does not remove the moral problem of cultivating lust. When a real person’s likeness is used without consent, an additional violation occurs. Technology can alter the supply chain of pornography; it cannot redefine the heart.

Pornography is not limited to video or photography. Written erotica, explicit audio, sexualized role-play with AI chatbots, and interactive synthetic companions can serve the same deliberate purpose: cultivating arousal through imagined sexual access outside covenant. The moral analysis therefore focuses not only on whether a performer was exploited but also on what the user is consenting to in the imagination. An AI-generated figure cannot be trafficked, yet a believer can still train desire toward lust, secrecy, infidelity, and mastery by appetite. Technology can remove one victim from the production chain while leaving the heart’s use of sexuality untouched ([Matthew 5:27-30](#)).

Pornography also requires safeguarding language. Exposure of children is not a rite of passage. Adults who intentionally show minors explicit material, solicit sexual images, or use pornography in grooming commit serious abuse. A child who encounters pornography accidentally or through coercion should not be treated as sexually dirty. Parents and churches should respond with calm truth, safety, age-appropriate explanation, practical controls, and professional help when exposure becomes traumatic or compulsive. Shame can drive secrecy; truthful discipleship should open a path into light.

The strongest pastoral rebuttal often comes from the married user who says pornography prevents physical adultery or compensates for a sexless marriage. The argument treats pornography as a lesser outlet. But Christian self-control is not the art of choosing a concealed sexual substitute so that a more visible betrayal can be avoided. Marital sexual difficulty can be painful and may require medical assessment, counseling, communication, treatment of trauma, or patient endurance. The spouse is not morally obligated to become pornography so that the other person will stop viewing pornography. Nor is one spouse entitled to sexual access through coercion because the other has a health condition, pain disorder, postpartum recovery, disability, or history of abuse.

Pastors must also avoid false spiritual shortcuts. “Just get married and the pornography will stop” is dangerous advice. Marriage does not cure lust. It can introduce an innocent spouse into a hidden pattern. “A demon of pornography left you, so accountability is unbelief” is equally irresponsible. Christians may pray for deliverance and should resist spiritual evil, but prayer is not permission to neglect the ordinary means of repentance, treatment, truth, and community.

The moral classification is not ambiguous for ordinary pornographic use: deliberately seeking explicit sexual material for lust conflicts with Jesus’ teaching on the heart and the New Testament call to sexual holiness. The methods by which a person restricts devices or seeks recovery are matters of wisdom. The clinical label “compulsive sexual behavior

disorder” belongs to healthcare, not to the church’s list of sins. A person can sin without having a disorder, and a person with a disorder still deserves careful moral and clinical care.

The gospel speaks to the porn user without flattery and without fatalism. Stop calling secrecy privacy. Stop calling purchased lust stress relief. Stop treating the people on the screen as though their humanity disappears when the browser opens. But do not conclude that years of pornography have made Christ powerless. Confess. Bring the pattern into trusted light. Make concrete changes. Seek competent help where compulsion is present. Receive the cleansing of Christ and learn again to see human bodies as belonging to persons, not to your appetite. The imagination can be disciplined.

7.6 Masturbation: Scripture, Conscience, and Competing Christian Arguments

Few sexual questions expose the difference between biblical command and Christian inference more clearly than masturbation. Scripture never directly names masturbation as a distinct act and never issues an explicit command, “You shall not masturbate.” That fact must be stated without embarrassment because Christians damage biblical authority when they invent verses God did not give. The familiar appeal to Onan in [Genesis 38:6–10](#) does not establish a prohibition of masturbation. Onan’s offense involves refusing his levirate obligation while exploiting Tamar sexually and deliberately preventing offspring in order to protect his own inheritance. The text is about covenantal injustice and disobedience, not a solitary sexual act.

From this silence, some Christians conclude that masturbation is morally permissible whenever it is not connected to pornography, lust toward a specific person, physical harm, compulsion, or violation of conscience. They argue that the body has ordinary sexual physiology, that nocturnal emissions are morally neutral, that sexual tension can be experienced outside marriage, and that Scripture should not be supplemented with prohibitions rooted in shame. Some clinicians may recommend masturbation in particular medical or therapeutic contexts. This position rightly warns against presenting human tradition as divine law.

Other Christians argue that masturbation is ordinarily inseparable from lust, sexual fantasy, self-focused gratification, and the deliberate arousal of sexual desire outside marital union. They appeal to Jesus’ teaching on lust ([Matthew 5:27–30](#)), Paul’s call to self-control ([1 Thessalonians 4:3–5](#)), the body belonging to the Lord ([1 Corinthians 6:12–20](#)), and the broader covenantal meaning of sexuality. On this view, even if the physical act is not named, the ordinary mental and moral context brings it under clear biblical principles.

A third approach focuses on conscience and habit. It avoids a universal declaration while asking whether the practice is mastered by fantasy, compulsion, secrecy, pornographic material, avoidance of marital intimacy, or inability to abstain. It also asks whether the person can engage in it with a clear conscience before God or whether the act repeatedly follows a pattern of conviction, rationalization, and relapse. [Romans 14:22–23](#) establishes that violating conscience is serious, though Romans 14 must not be used to turn explicit sins into private options.

A careful biblical conclusion should preserve what each perspective sees accurately. First, masturbation is not explicitly prohibited by name. Therefore Christians should not quote Onan as though the case were closed. Second, the absence of a named prohibition does not make every instance morally neutral. Scripture governs inner lust, self-control, mastery, marital faithfulness, and the use of the body. Third, context matters. Masturbation while viewing pornography or deliberately fantasizing sexually about someone outside marriage involves lust even if the physical act itself remains unnamed. Fourth, repeated inability to stop may signal a habit or compulsive pattern requiring more structured help. Fifth, no Christian should make abstinence from masturbation a ground of justification or a visible badge by which salvation is inferred.

The question becomes especially delicate in marriage. A spouse may use masturbation in ways that displace marital intimacy, hide pornography, cultivate fantasy about others, or become a secret alternative to communicating about sexual difficulty. Those patterns can wound covenant. Other circumstances may involve temporary physical separation, medical limitations, disability, or mutual discussion. Scripture does not provide a case law for every such situation. Christians should resist the impulse to create one. Marital sexuality itself is governed by mutuality, love, truth, and self-control, not merely by whether an act can be named in a concordance.

The pastoral danger is shame. Some believers have spent years believing that a single failure in this area proves they are disgusting, unsaved, or permanently polluted. That response can create obsessive monitoring, vows, cycles of despair, and a distorted view of God. Scrupulous consciences need help distinguishing temptation, bodily arousal, intrusive imagery, nocturnal emissions, and chosen behavior. A person with obsessive-compulsive symptoms may need clinical care rather than an ever-expanding list of confessions for thoughts never chosen.

The opposite danger is rationalization. “The Bible never mentions it” can become a way to refuse every question about fantasy, mastery, pornography, and spiritual fruit. Biblical ethics often works through principles. Scripture never

mentions internet sexting, insider trading, deepfake pornography, or cocaine by name. Moral reasoning does not stop where the vocabulary of the first century stops.

There is also a gendered hypocrisy to correct. Churches have sometimes treated male masturbation as an almost inevitable weakness while shaming women as uniquely impure for sexual self-stimulation. Scripture gives no basis for that double standard. Men and women are both moral agents. Both can experience bodily arousal. Both can lust. Both can practice self-control. Both can receive grace.

The moral classification therefore remains intentionally precise. Pornographic and lustful masturbation falls under explicit or clearly applicable biblical prohibitions concerning lust and sexual immorality. Masturbation as an isolated physical act is not explicitly named, so claims of universal prohibition rely on theological inference rather than a direct command. Habit, mastery, conscience, marital effect, motive, and context must be examined. This is exactly the kind of question where Chapter 14's larger distinction between command, principle, wisdom, and conscience will matter.

The self-examination is not improved by pretending certainty where Scripture leaves an inferential step. Ask instead: what is happening in my imagination? Can I stop? What does the practice train me to desire? Does it drive me toward pornography? Does it reduce another person to fantasy? Does it hide marital problems I refuse to address? Am I violating conscience? Am I terrified by a bodily response I did not choose? Truth may require repentance, or it may require release from false guilt. The Lord knows which.

7.7 Sexting, Nude Images, and Digital Sexuality

Digital sexual communication collapses distance. A photograph can move from an intimate relationship to a school, workplace, public platform, extortion network, or artificial-intelligence dataset in seconds. A message intended to disappear may be captured. A face can be copied, altered, and redistributed. A teenager may experience pressure to send an image as proof of trust. An adult may exchange explicit material during courtship and discover after a breakup that privacy depended entirely on another person's character.

Research on adolescent sexting should be used without sensationalism. A large meta-analysis by Madigan et al. (2018) found that among young people in the included studies, receiving sexual messages or images was more common than sending them, and a minority reported forwarding sexts without consent or having their own sext forwarded. A subsequent meta-analysis found associations between youth sexting and several sexual-risk, internalizing, and substance-use outcomes, while emphasizing that much of the evidence was correlational and could not establish simple causal pathways (Mori et al., 2019). These findings justify safeguarding concern. They do not prove that every adolescent who has sexted is on an inevitable trajectory toward pathology.

For unmarried Christians, deliberate exchange of sexually explicit images or messages generally functions as sexual activity outside marriage. It is designed to arouse, expose, and create a form of erotic access that belongs within the covenantal logic already established. The screen does not turn sexual conduct into moral neutrality. A couple who says, "We have not physically had sex," while exchanging nude images may be technically distinguishing acts but missing the moral substance of what they are cultivating.

Within marriage, the moral question is different. Scripture does not prohibit spouses from erotic communication. The Song of Songs shows that marital speech can be sensuous and delighted. Yet digital transmission introduces prudential risks that the biblical world did not contain. Phones are lost, accounts are breached, cloud backups persist, workplaces monitor devices, relationships can deteriorate, and images can be stolen. A married couple may therefore conclude that explicit digital images are unwise even if the underlying marital desire is legitimate. Another couple may use private verbal communication without images. This is substantially a wisdom and security question, not an occasion for a universal rule unsupported by Scripture.

Nonconsensual distribution changes the moral category sharply. Sharing another person's intimate image without permission is betrayal and exploitation. The victim is not morally responsible for the distributor's sin simply because the image was originally created voluntarily. A poor decision can increase vulnerability without transferring guilt for another person's revenge. Churches must resist the reflex to ask first, "Why did you send it?" when a person reports image-based abuse. The urgent questions are safety, preservation of evidence, reporting where appropriate, removal processes, and pastoral support.

Sextortion is especially serious. Offenders may threaten to publish images unless victims provide money, more images, sexual acts, or continued compliance. Young people can be targeted through social platforms and gaming environments. Shame may make them afraid to tell parents. Christian safeguarding must therefore make disclosure safer than secrecy. A child who comes forward should hear, "You did the right thing by telling us," even if the child also made an unwise choice. The adult's first task is protection, not a moral lecture.

The problem of consent is intensified with minors. The legal treatment of self-generated sexual images varies by jurisdiction, and Christians should not casually make universal legal claims. What is morally clear is that adults must not solicit sexual images from minors, sexualize pastoral or educational relationships with them, or normalize exchanges that compromise safeguarding. Where suspected child sexual exploitation or abuse is present, responsible adults should follow applicable reporting law and safeguarding policy rather than conducting an amateur secret investigation.

Artificial intelligence further complicates digital sexuality. A person can now generate sexualized images that resemble classmates, celebrities, colleagues, former partners, or children. The moral imagination that once required a camera can operate through prompts. If a real person's likeness is sexualized without consent, the offense involves objectification and violation even though no physical encounter occurred. If an entirely fictional adult image is generated, direct performer exploitation may be absent, but the user still must answer what the practice is training the imagination to do. Synthetic supply does not sanctify lust.

Digital discipleship therefore needs more than “do not send nudes.” Families and churches should teach why privacy is fragile, why coercive requests are not love, why consent can be withdrawn, why screenshots change the risk, why a secret adult relationship is a safeguarding warning, and why seeking help is not a disgrace. Adolescents need truthful education before crisis, not only punishment after it.

The moral classification is again layered. Sexualized communication outside marriage is governed by the biblical prohibition of sexual immorality and lust. Nonconsensual image distribution and coercion are direct violations of love, truth, and neighbor dignity. Marital digital intimacy may fall within liberty and wisdom, but digital permanence and security create real prudential reasons for restraint. Parents' choice of filters, monitoring software, device curfews, and age thresholds belongs to wisdom and should be adapted to maturity rather than treated as one divine schedule.

The gospel response must protect the violated and confront the violator. If your image was shared without consent, your worth did not leak onto the internet. If you sent an image unwisely, you may need to acknowledge that decision, but you are not responsible for another person's extortion or distribution. If you are the one keeping, forwarding, trading, or threatening with another person's intimate material, repent immediately, stop the harm, delete what you possess where doing so does not destroy evidence needed for a legal investigation, and submit to appropriate accountability. Grace does not cover exploitation by helping it disappear.

7.8 Prostitution, Sexual Exploitation, and Commercialized Desire

Commercial sex sits at the intersection of sexual morality, money, power, vulnerability, agency, and exploitation. The word “prostitution” can describe very different realities: an adult who says she or he freely sells sexual services, a person constrained by poverty or debt, someone controlled by a pimp, a migrant whose documents are withheld, a minor being commercially exploited, or a trafficking victim subjected to force, fraud, coercion, or abuse of vulnerability. Ethical analysis fails when every case is flattened into the same story.

The strongest contemporary defense of consensual adult sex work argues from agency and harm reduction. Some adults describe selling sexual services as chosen labor and contend that criminalization increases danger by driving the market underground. Advocates distinguish sex work from trafficking, insist that workers should be able to report violence without fear, and argue that economic and health protections may reduce harm. Christians should represent this argument accurately. It is false and harmful to claim that every person who sells sex is necessarily trafficked.

The biblical moral judgment on purchasing or selling sexual access does not depend on proving trafficking in every case. Paul directly confronts sex with a prostitute in [1 Corinthians 6:15-20](#). His argument is remarkable because he does not treat the transaction as morally thin. He says sexual union creates a bodily relation that contradicts belonging to Christ. Proverbs warns repeatedly against forms of illicit sexual commerce and seduction ([Proverbs 5:1-14](#); [Proverbs 7:1-27](#)). The buyer cannot excuse himself by saying money made the exchange honest. The body of another person is not a commodity to which payment creates moral entitlement.

Commercialization also changes the social meaning of desire. A market can train the wealthy to expect erotic access from the economically vulnerable. It can make intimacy scalable, purchasable, and detached from covenant. The buyer may imagine himself generous or merely pragmatic. Scripture asks a harder question: what does it mean to use money to obtain sexual access to a person who is not one's spouse?

Trafficking makes the injustice more severe. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2024 global report, detected trafficking continues to include both forced labor and sexual exploitation, with women and girls heavily represented among detected victims of sexual exploitation (UNODC, 2024). Global estimates developed by the International Labour Organization, Walk Free, and the International Organization for Migration estimated millions of people in forced commercial sexual exploitation in 2021 (ILO et al., 2022). These figures should be

interpreted as estimates or detected cases, not exact counts of every hidden victim. They are sufficient to establish that sexual exploitation is not a rhetorical invention.

Children cannot consent to commercial sexual exploitation in the adult sense. Calling a commercially exploited child a “child prostitute” can obscure the direction of responsibility. The child is a victim of exploitation. Churches, charities, police, healthcare providers, and social services should treat protection, trauma-informed care, legal safeguarding, and long-term recovery as priorities.

Economic vulnerability complicates adult agency without erasing it. A person may formally consent while facing hunger, debt, displacement, abusive relationships, or lack of employment. Christian compassion should therefore resist the easy hierarchy in which the buyer is respectable and the seller is shamed. The buyer often has more social power. Jesus’ treatment of sexually stigmatized people consistently exposes religious self-righteousness. He receives repentance without pretending sin is virtue ([Luke 7:36–50](#)). The church should be a place where a person leaving prostitution can receive practical help with housing, employment, healthcare, legal needs, childcare, trauma, and community rather than only a sermon about the past.

Pornography overlaps with commercialized desire but should not be equated automatically with trafficking. Some pornographic production involves coercion or exploitation; other production is represented by adults as consensual. Responsible argument should not use the most horrific trafficking case to describe every explicit image. The Christian case against pornography, as already argued, does not need that exaggeration. Lust and commodification are sufficient moral concerns, while exploitation adds further wrongdoing where it is present.

Churches must also examine their own markets. A pastor who exchanges spiritual favor, money, employment, grades, visas, prophecy, healing promises, or charity for sexual access is practicing exploitation even if no cash changes hands. A “sugar” arrangement can involve materially unequal bargaining. A ministry leader who tells a vulnerable person that sex is required for deliverance, anointing, fertility, or prophetic activation commits spiritual and sexual abuse. No biblical doctrine of anointing authorizes sexual access.

Some New Age and esoteric sexual systems commercialize intimacy through claims of sacred sexuality, erotic healing, tantric initiation, or energy transfer. Not every body-based therapeutic practice is sexual abuse, and historic Tantric traditions are far more complex than Western commercial branding. But when a practitioner claims special spiritual authority to cross sexual boundaries, the combination of money, secrecy, touch, and promised enlightenment demands scrutiny. Christian spirituality does not require sexual initiation by a guru.

The moral classification is clear concerning sexual commerce itself: sex outside marriage conflicts with biblical chastity, and exploitation, trafficking, coercion, deceit, and abuse of power add grave violations of justice and love. Policy questions about criminalization, decriminalization, policing, public health, and social support are prudential and empirical matters on which Christians may debate strategies while agreeing on the dignity and protection of vulnerable persons.

The gospel response refuses the social sorting of sinners. The buyer must repent. The trafficker must repent and face justice. The person who has sold sex is not beyond grace. The trafficked person must not be treated as morally contaminated. Churches should stop speaking as though respectable consumers are less sinful than stigmatized sellers. Christ’s kingdom exposes the market in which bodies are bought, and then opens a door no market can purchase: cleansing, belonging, honest work, restored community, and a new name in Christ.

7.9 Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce is one of the places where simple slogans do the most pastoral damage. The familiar sentence “God hates divorce” comes from a traditional rendering of [Malachi 2:16](#), but modern translations differ over the grammar. The surrounding passage is not morally ambiguous: God condemns treachery against one’s covenant wife and violence bound up with covenant betrayal ([Malachi 2:13–16](#)). The problem with the slogan is therefore not that covenant-breaking divorce is morally neutral. The problem is that four words can be detached from their context and used as a complete answer to cases involving adultery, abandonment, danger, or abuse that the rest of Scripture requires us to distinguish. The opposite slogan, “God wants you happy,” is equally inadequate when it makes covenant expendable whenever fulfillment declines. The biblical witness treats marriage as a serious covenant intended for permanence, recognizes human hardness and betrayal, permits or regulates divorce in particular circumstances, and calls the church to protect the vulnerable while refusing the normalization of disposable marriage.

Jesus’ teaching begins with creation. Asked whether a man may divorce his wife “for any reason,” He returns to male and female creation, one flesh, and God’s joining action, then says that what God has joined human beings should not separate ([Matthew 19:3–6](#)). He explains that Moses permitted divorce because of hardness of heart, but “it was not like that from the beginning” ([Matthew 19:7–8](#)). The controlling moral vision is therefore covenant permanence, not the search for the easiest exit.

The contested question concerns exceptions and remarriage. Matthew records Jesus' exception involving *porneia* ([Matthew 5:32](#); [Matthew 19:9](#)). Mark and Luke give more absolute formulations ([Mark 10:11-12](#); [Luke 16:18](#)). Paul instructs married believers not to divorce and tells a separated spouse to remain unmarried or reconcile, then addresses marriages to unbelievers and says that if the unbelieving spouse departs, the believer is “not bound” in such circumstances ([1 Corinthians 7:10-16](#)).

Serious Christian interpreters have reached different conclusions. A strict position argues that divorce may sometimes occur but remarriage while a former spouse lives is generally forbidden, reading Jesus' sayings as protecting the indissolubility of the marriage bond (Heth & Wenham, 1984). A common Protestant position understands sexual immorality and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse as covenant-breaking grounds that can permit divorce and subsequent remarriage for the innocent party. A broader contextual approach argues that first-century hearers would have understood serious neglect or abuse as covenant violations within the background of biblical and Jewish divorce law, so Paul's abandonment principle may encompass forms of destructive desertion (Instone-Brewer, 2002). These disagreements should not be hidden behind claims that only one side has ever taken Scripture seriously.

Several conclusions are clearer than the disputed edges. First, Scripture condemns frivolous, self-serving divorce. One cannot discard a spouse merely because another person is more attractive, because marriage has become difficult, or because personal growth has taken a different direction. Second, adultery is covenant betrayal. Matthew's exception cannot be made meaningless. Third, abandonment matters. Paul does not command a believer to maintain the fiction of an intact marriage when an unbelieving spouse has actually deserted it. Fourth, death ends the marital bond and leaves the surviving spouse free to marry in the Lord ([Romans 7:2-3](#); [1 Corinthians 7:39](#)).

Abuse requires particular care because victims have been gravely harmed by bad theology. Scripture nowhere commands a spouse or child to remain in immediate danger so that a household can preserve the appearance of marriage. Civil separation, emergency shelter, protective orders, police intervention, medical care, and safeguarding can be necessary acts of wisdom and justice. Forgiveness does not require physical proximity to an unrepentant abuser. Reconciliation without repentance, safety, truth, and accountability is not biblical reconciliation.

Whether severe or persistent abuse itself constitutes a biblically sufficient ground for divorce and remarriage is debated. Christians who answer yes often reason from covenant obligations, abandonment, the duty to protect life, and the moral substance of destructive desertion. Christians who answer no may still affirm long-term separation for safety while holding a stricter doctrine of remarriage. Pastors should distinguish what is explicit from what is inferred. They should never use uncertainty about remarriage to force immediate cohabitation with a violent spouse.

The author's recent Rwanda-centered study reinforces the need for this thicker pastoral approach. Marital breakdown among Christians is multicausal, involving economic stress, violence, shifting expectations, digital pressures, social transition, and weak pastoral formation, while churches can focus on prohibition without investing adequately in prevention, conflict intervention, trauma-aware care, and post-divorce accompaniment (Sangwa et al., 2026). Biblical fidelity requires more than telling couples not to divorce. It requires teaching them how to tell truth, handle money, resolve conflict, reject violence, remain sexually faithful, seek help early, and protect children.

Remarriage must also be handled without creating permanent castes in the church. A person who divorced sinfully should repent. If reconciliation with a former spouse is morally possible and both are unmarried, it may deserve serious consideration. But some histories cannot simply be reversed. A former spouse may have remarried. There may be children in a new household. A current marriage should not be destroyed in an attempt to repair a past wrong. Scripture's call is to faithfulness now, not to multiply covenant breaking in the name of correcting it.

Churches should also stop assuming that every divorced person is the guilty party or that a married person is spiritually superior. A spouse may have been abandoned. A survivor may have escaped violence. A person may have sinned grievously and repented deeply. Another may have remained married while practicing years of cruelty, adultery, or coercion. Marital status alone does not reveal the heart.

The moral classification has both clarity and contested edges. God's design for marital permanence and prohibitions of adultery, treacherous divorce, and sexual immorality are explicit. The Matthean exception and Pauline abandonment text establish at least some exceptional complexity. How abuse relates to abandonment and when remarriage is permitted require exegetical and pastoral judgment among serious Christians. No one should convert one disputed inference into a weapon that denies fellowship to every believer who reaches a different conclusion in good faith.

Pastors should ask more than, “Is divorce allowed?” They should ask: Is anyone unsafe? Has adultery occurred? Is there coercive control? Has an unbelieving spouse abandoned the marriage? Is the alleged “irreconcilable difference” actually untreated violence or merely unwillingness to forgive? Are children being used as leverage? Is a new romantic relationship driving the desire to leave? Has the church listened to both parties without forcing a victim into joint counseling with an abuser? Does the congregation have qualified referral pathways rather than asking elders to function as amateur therapists and investigators?

The gospel does not guarantee restoration of every marriage. It offers something deeper: truth without hiding, forgiveness without denial, justice without vengeance, and hope when consequences remain. A betrayed spouse may be

reconciled. Another marriage may end. A divorced person may live faithfully in singleness or, where biblically free, remarry with wisdom. A person who caused the collapse may repent and still face lasting consequences. None of these people is saved by marital outcome. They are saved by Christ. The marriage covenant matters precisely because the Savior does not teach us to call treachery love, and grace matters precisely because broken covenants are not stronger than His cross.

7.10 Homosexuality and Same-Sex Relationships

The Christian debate over homosexuality is not served by pretending that all questions are simple or that all biblical texts have been used responsibly. The word “homosexuality” can refer to orientation, attraction, behavior, relationships, identity, or a modern social category that does not map neatly onto ancient vocabulary. Those distinctions matter. A person who experiences same-sex attraction but abstains from same-sex sexual behavior is not doing the same thing as a person in a same-sex sexual relationship. A teenager questioning attraction is not the same pastoral case as an adult demanding that the church bless a marriage. A person who uses “gay” descriptively while affirming celibacy may mean something very different from a person who makes sexual orientation morally constitutive of the self.

The first biblical task is therefore to identify what Scripture actually addresses. Genesis establishes the male-female form of marriage and one-flesh union ([Genesis 1:27-28](#); [Genesis 2:18-24](#)). Jesus receives this pattern in His teaching on marriage ([Matthew 19:4-6](#)). The Mosaic law explicitly prohibits male same-sex intercourse in [Leviticus 18:22](#) and [Leviticus 20:13](#). Paul describes same-sex sexual relations among both women and men in [Romans 1:24-27](#) within a larger account of humanity’s exchange of the Creator for created things. He also includes disputed Greek terms in vice lists in [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#) and [1 Timothy 1:8-11](#), most notably *arsenokoitai* and, in [1 Corinthians](#), *malakoi*.

Traditional interpretation sees these texts, together with the positive biblical pattern of marriage, as a coherent prohibition of same-sex sexual behavior. Revisionist interpretation raises several serious objections. First, the ancient world knew forms of same-sex behavior shaped by domination, pederasty, slavery, prostitution, excessive lust, and status inequality, so the texts may not address modern covenanted same-sex relationships. Second, *arsenokoitai* is rare and lexically difficult; *malakoi* literally means “soft” and has had varied uses. Third, [Romans 1](#) may describe excessive or idolatrous passions rather than stable sexual orientation. Fourth, Jesus never directly discusses same-sex relationships. Fifth, the Bible itself contains trajectories in which groups once excluded are later included, so the church may need to extend covenantal mercy in ways biblical authors did not yet envisage (Brownson, 2013; Hays & Hays, 2024).

These arguments deserve serious engagement because Christian fidelity does not require poor exegesis. The Sodom narrative, for example, should not carry the entire case against consensual same-sex relationships. [Genesis 19:1-11](#) depicts threatened gang rape, humiliation, violence, and gross inhospitality. Ezekiel later indicts Sodom for pride, abundance, neglect of the poor, and abominations ([Ezekiel 16:49-50](#)). Jude refers to sexual immorality and pursuit of “strange flesh” ([Jude 7](#)). Whatever wider sexual conclusions one draws, the narrative is not a clean description of a loving same-sex couple. It is therefore irresponsible to treat “Sodom” as the strongest or only proof text.

The Levitical texts require covenantal analysis. Christians are not under Israel’s ceremonial and civil code in the same way ancient Israel was. Food laws, sacrificial regulations, purity rules, and national penalties cannot simply be transferred to the church. Yet [Leviticus 18](#) places same-sex intercourse among sexual prohibitions that include incest, adultery, and bestiality, and the chapter presents these practices as defiling acts associated with the nations, not merely priestly ritual taboos ([Leviticus 18:6-30](#)). The New Testament does not reproduce Israel’s civil penalty, but it does independently address same-sex sexual conduct. Therefore the Christian conclusion does not depend on importing the Mosaic legal system wholesale.

[Romans 1](#) is especially important because Paul refers to female as well as male same-sex relations and describes exchanged sexual relations in a creation-theological argument. Some interpreters argue that “against nature” means against an individual’s personal heterosexual nature, so Paul is condemning heterosexual people who abandon their orientation through excess. Yet Paul’s surrounding language of Creator and creation, male and female exchange, and the broader Jewish moral framework makes a creation-order reading more likely (Loader, 2012; Gagnon, 2001). Paul was not writing with a modern psychological theory of orientation, but moral norms do not become inapplicable merely because ancient authors lacked later taxonomy.

The lexical debate over [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#) should likewise be handled carefully. *Malakoi* can mean “soft” and in various contexts could describe effeminacy, moral softness, or particular sexual roles. It should not be translated by simply importing modern stereotypes about masculine behavior. *Arsenokoitai* is rarer, but many scholars see a plausible connection to the Greek wording of [Leviticus](#) prohibitions concerning a male lying with a male. Lexical uncertainty should make translators cautious about overclaiming every social category. It does not erase the broader biblical sexual ethic established independently of one disputed term.

The argument from Jesus' silence also proves too much. Jesus did not directly discuss every moral question His disciples would face. He affirmed the Scriptures, taught from the creation pattern of marriage, condemned *porneia*, and commissioned apostles whose teaching the church receives ([Matthew 5:17-20](#); [Matthew 15:19](#); [Matthew 19:4-9](#); [John 16:12-15](#)). Silence about a modern category is not approval.

The trajectory argument from inclusion is the most theologically substantial revisionist case. Hays and Hays (2024) argue that the biblical story repeatedly widens mercy and reconfigures boundaries, inviting the church to include LGBTQ people more fully. Christians should affirm the first half without hesitation: God's mercy does widen to the nations, eunuchs, outsiders, sinners, and people once considered far off. The gospel destroys ethnic boasting and creates one people in Christ ([Isaiah 56:3-8](#); [Acts 10:1-48](#); [Ephesians 2:11-22](#)). The question is whether inclusion into God's people entails moral affirmation of every practice previously prohibited. In Acts 10, Gentiles are included through faith and the gift of the Spirit, yet the apostolic church does not infer that idolatry or sexual immorality is therefore blessed. The Jerusalem council explicitly welcomes Gentiles while instructing them to abstain from sexual immorality ([Acts 15:19-29](#)). Mercy widens the people of God; it does not render holiness meaningless.

The traditional conclusion should therefore be stated without euphemism and without contempt: Scripture does not provide a positive category for same-sex sexual union or same-sex marriage, and its relevant texts consistently place same-sex sexual behavior outside the sexual covenant God gives. That conclusion is an explicit or strongly cumulative biblical moral judgment on conduct, not a judgment that same-sex attraction itself is chosen sin.

This distinction is pastorally decisive. Same-sex attraction can be experienced as unwanted, persistent, and deeply personal. A Christian who experiences such attraction and resists sexual expression in obedience to Christ should not be treated as perpetually suspect or spiritually inferior. He or she may display costly faithfulness that many married Christians have never had to practice. The church should not reduce the person to the attraction. Nor should it promise that conversion necessarily removes the attraction. Scripture promises forgiveness, the Spirit, sanctification, and resurrection. It does not promise that every disordered or unwanted desire will disappear on a timetable before glory.

Professional psychology also warns against coercive attempts to guarantee orientation change. Major professional bodies, including the American Psychological Association, oppose sexual-orientation change efforts and cite insufficient evidence of reliable change together with potential harms, especially where coercion or shame is involved (American Psychological Association, 2021). Christians need not accept psychology as a moral authority to hear the empirical caution. Pastoral discipleship can support a person's voluntarily chosen commitment to chastity, prayer, friendship, and biblical conviction without marketing therapy as a technology guaranteed to make a gay person heterosexual.

Church belonging therefore requires both welcome and discipleship. A celibate same-sex attracted Christian who confesses the church's sexual ethic should not be kept at arm's length merely because temptation persists. A person in an active same-sex relationship should be treated with dignity, invited to hear the gospel, welcomed to attend worship according to the congregation's ordinary hospitality, and called to the same repentance expected of every other person. Church membership and leadership involve accountable profession and conduct. The standard should not be selective. A congregation that disciplines a same-sex couple while ignoring heterosexual cohabitation, adultery, pornography, abuse, or predatory leaders has not become more biblical by being strict in one direction.

Identity labels require wisdom. Some believers reject "gay Christian" because they fear it makes a fallen desire an ontological identity. Others use the phrase to name an enduring experience while explicitly denying that the desire governs ethics. Scripture does not adjudicate modern English labels directly. The decisive question is whether identity language is subordinate to Christ or is being used to demand moral authorization. Believers should be slow to anathematize one another over terminology where the underlying theology and conduct are faithful.

Same-sex marriage raises a clearer doctrinal question because marriage is not merely an identity label. Civil governments may legally recognize unions that churches cannot theologically call marriage. Christians should distinguish legal citizenship questions from ecclesial blessing. Treating same-sex neighbors with civil dignity, opposing violence, and defending ordinary legal protections does not require the church to redefine the sacrament or covenant of marriage. Conversely, refusing ecclesial recognition does not authorize harassment or unequal treatment in matters unrelated to the church's doctrine.

The self-examination must reach the heterosexual reader too. Is my outrage selective because another person's temptation is socially easier for me to condemn? Do I praise marriage while tolerating porn, lust, crude jokes, serial fornication, marital coercion, or divorce for convenience? Do I use the truth as permission to be cruel? Or have I become so afraid of being thought cruel that I call affirmation love even when it requires me to contradict Scripture? The narrow way refuses both contempt and surrender. It tells the truth because the person in front of us is worth more than our reputation.

7.11 Gender Identity and the Sexed Body

Gender identity debates require unusually careful distinctions because several different questions are often compressed into one word. Biological sex refers to the organization of human bodies around reproductive roles and includes chromosomes, gonads, internal and external reproductive anatomy, hormones, and secondary sex characteristics. Gender can refer to social roles, expectations, cultural stereotypes, or, in contemporary clinical and social usage, a person's experienced identity. Gender dysphoria describes distress associated with incongruence between experienced gender and sex; the World Health Organization's ICD-11 uses "gender incongruence" in a sexual-health chapter rather than classifying it as a mental disorder and explicitly distinguishes the condition from gender-variant behavior alone (World Health Organization, 2019). These descriptive and diagnostic choices do not themselves decide Christian anthropology.

Scripture begins human embodiment with male and female creation ([Genesis 1:27](#)). That affirmation is theological before it is political. Sexed embodiment is not a divine mistake to be escaped through spiritual enlightenment. Jesus receives the created male-female pattern in His teaching ([Matthew 19:4](#)). The incarnation further confirms that salvation does not occur by leaving bodily reality behind. The eternal Son became flesh ([John 1:14](#)), died bodily, rose bodily, and promises bodily resurrection. Christian hope therefore resists both body hatred and the idea that the deepest self possesses absolute authority to redefine the meaning of the body.

At the same time, male and female creation should not be confused with every cultural stereotype about masculinity and femininity. Scripture does not teach that a boy who dislikes sport is less male, that a girl who enjoys engineering is less female, that men may not be gentle, that women may not lead organizations, or that every local custom about clothing and occupation is built into chromosomes. Some gender distress may be intensified by rigid stereotypes. The church should not tell a child, "Because you do not fit our cultural script for boys, perhaps you are not a boy." Biblical sex is more stable than gender stereotypes, which allows greater freedom in personality rather than less.

The strongest defense of transgender affirmation begins with suffering. Some people report persistent dysphoria so severe that ordinary social functioning becomes difficult. Supporters of social and medical transition argue that respecting asserted identity, using chosen names and pronouns, and providing puberty blockers, hormones, or surgery in appropriately assessed cases can reduce distress and support wellbeing. They also point out that rejection, bullying, family conflict, and discrimination can contribute substantially to poor mental-health outcomes. Those realities demand compassion and accurate representation.

Clinical policy is not globally uniform, especially for minors. The 2024 Cass Review in England concluded that the evidence base for pediatric gender medicine was limited in important respects and recommended a more holistic, multidisciplinary model of care. NHS England's 2024 clinical policy states that puberty-suppressing hormones are not available as a routine commissioning treatment option for children and young people with gender incongruence or dysphoria. A new NHS Children and Young People's Gender Service specification took effect in April 2026. NHS England then ran a March-June 2026 consultation on a revised policy for masculinising and feminising hormones; as of this chapter's final review on 23 August 2026, NHS England's clinical-programme page still listed the previous hormone policy as paused during the revised policy process. By contrast, the American Academy of Pediatrics' 2018 policy statement, reaffirmed in August 2023, supports a gender-affirming model. These differences do not make medical evidence irrelevant. They demonstrate why Christian writing should distinguish institutional policy, evidence appraisal, clinical judgment, and theological evaluation rather than invoke "science" as though one global clinical consensus had settled every question (Cass, 2024; NHS England, 2024, 2026a, 2026b; Rafferty et al., 2018).

For Christian ethics, diagnosis must be distinguished from moral responsibility. Experiencing gender dysphoria or incongruence is not itself a sin. A distressed teenager did not choose the existence of distress in the same way one chooses a lie or an act of adultery. The church should not greet dysphoria with mockery, disgust, or instant accusation. Nor should it assume that every case has the same origin. Development, mental health, autism, trauma, family dynamics, social influences, body image, sexual orientation, and individual temperament can interact differently across persons. Pastoral care should not pretend to diagnose.

The moral and theological question concerns what the distress is permitted to define. A Christian anthropology cannot locate the truest self in an inner identity that possesses final authority over sexed embodiment. Feelings can be profound and still require interpretation. The body can be difficult to receive and still be a gift. This is the same Creator-creature logic applied earlier to other desires, though gender distress should not be rhetorically equated with greed, lust, or vanity. The phenomenology is different. The governing question is shared: does the self receive identity from God, or does inner experience become the highest court?

Social transition raises questions of truth, care, and prudence. Changes of name, clothing, hairstyle, and social presentation do not all carry the same moral meaning in every context. Many names are not sex-specific, and clothing conventions vary by culture. A social transition that explicitly asserts that a male person is female or a female person male raises a deeper conflict with biblical sexed anthropology. Yet the pastoral response should not be reduced to

confrontation over every word before trust exists. Parents and churches need patient, truthful relationships in which the person remains loved and safe.

Pronouns are particularly contested because language can function differently. One Christian sees pronoun use corresponding to asserted gender as participation in a false claim. Another treats it as a conventional form of courtesy that does not settle metaphysics. A third avoids the conflict by using the person's name. Scripture does not provide an explicit pronoun policy for modern gender discourse. Therefore the church should acknowledge a conscience and wisdom question while preserving a commitment to truth and love. Mocking pronouns, deliberately humiliating people, or using language as a weapon is not Christian courage. At the same time, conscience should not be coerced as though contested speech formulas were morally simple.

Medical transition requires even greater care. Puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and surgeries have different effects, risks, reversibility profiles, and indications. No responsible Christian manuscript should treat them as one procedure. Some interventions can alter fertility, sexual function, bone health, cardiovascular risk, or anatomy; specific risks vary by treatment and patient. Adults generally possess greater decisional capacity than children, but adult autonomy is not the only Christian moral criterion. Theologically, elective medical alteration intended to make a sexed body appear or function as the opposite sex raises serious concerns about rejecting creaturely givenness. That concern should be stated while also recognizing that clinicians and patients may be trying to relieve severe distress rather than celebrating rebellion.

Minors require stronger safeguarding because developmental capacity, long-term consequences, family authority, and evidence uncertainty are different. The church should reject both political panic and therapeutic haste. A child reporting dysphoria deserves time, careful assessment, family support, protection from bullying, and attention to coexisting mental-health or developmental needs. The goal should not be to force a predetermined ideological outcome but to care truthfully for the whole child. Policies that foreclose all questioning can be as unhelpful as policies that treat the child as morally defective from the outset.

Claims that transition is always a “medical necessity” or always “mutilation” oversimplify the clinical and moral landscape. Christian reasoning should distinguish compassionate medical intention from theological evaluation of the intervention. It should also distinguish reconstructive treatment for injury or congenital difference from interventions intended to alter sexed appearance because of identity incongruence. Chapter 6 made the same general point in cosmetic ethics: not all bodily alteration carries the same meaning.

The church must also reject pseudo-spiritual explanations. A person with gender dysphoria should not be told that a “Jezebel spirit,” ancestral curse, demon of homosexuality, or occult transfer has been diagnosed by intuition. Spiritual warfare is real; naming demons without revelation is not discernment. Likewise, New Age claims that people carry metaphysical “divine masculine” and “divine feminine” energies should not be used to interpret gender distress. Scripture grounds manhood and womanhood in created human embodiment, not cosmic polarity systems.

The moral classification is therefore differentiated. The male-female reality of created human embodiment is a theological norm. Gender dysphoria itself is a condition of distress, not an explicit sin. Cultural gender expression often belongs to liberty. Social and medical transition raise moral questions where they are intended to assert or embody a sex identity contrary to the person's sex, but specific pastoral counsel requires age, capacity, medical facts, context, and conscience. Pronoun practice is a contested wisdom and conscience issue in which truth and courtesy must both be taken seriously.

The person at the center must not disappear beneath the debate. If you experience gender dysphoria, the church should not ask you to pretend the distress is trivial. It should also not promise that affirming every interpretation of the distress is the only form of love. Christ's invitation is not “hate your body” and not “your inner self is sovereign.” It is “come to me.” Christian hope says the body can be received even when receiving it is painful, and that resurrection rather than self-invention is the final answer to embodied groaning ([Romans 8:22-25](#); [Philippians 3:20-21](#)).

7.12 Intersex Conditions and Gender Ideology

Intersex conditions, often discussed clinically under the terms differences or disorders of sex development (DSD), require a separate section because they are frequently used as rhetorical weapons by both sides. These are congenital variations in chromosomal, gonadal, hormonal, internal reproductive, or external genital development. They are individually uncommon and medically heterogeneous. Some are recognized at birth, some at puberty, and some only during fertility assessment. Modern clinical guidance emphasizes multidisciplinary, patient- and family-centered care because medical, psychological, surgical, fertility, and identity questions can be complex (Avanceña et al., 2024; Asamoah & Clagg, 2026; Ishii et al., 2026).

The first Christian obligation is to speak about people, not examples. A person with a DSD is not a debate prop. He or she may face surgeries, infertility, secrecy, stigma, uncertainty, difficult family decisions, or questions about identity

that outsiders have never had to confront. Churches should not seize a person's anatomy to win an argument about culture. Image-bearing dignity comes before controversy.

The strongest ideological argument says that intersex variations disprove the binary character of human sex. If chromosomes, gonads, hormones, and anatomy can diverge, then “male and female” is said to be a social simplification rather than an objective biological structure. From this, some infer that gender identity rather than sexed embodiment should be primary for everyone.

The existence of DSDs unquestionably complicates simplistic claims such as “sex is determined by one trait with no exceptions.” Biological sex involves multiple coordinated features, and congenital development can vary. But a developmental variation does not by itself abolish the underlying organization around male and female reproductive roles. Medical literature can describe DSDs precisely because there is an expected pattern of chromosomal, gonadal, and anatomical development relative to male or female pathways (Avanceña et al., 2024; Asamoah & Clagg, 2026). The exceptions are real; the categories are not therefore unreal.

Christians should also resist overstated prevalence claims. Estimates vary dramatically depending on which traits are included under “intersex.” Some broad advocacy definitions include conditions that do not ordinarily produce ambiguous sex assignment, while narrower clinical definitions yield much smaller numbers. A publication-quality argument does not need to settle an exact percentage. It is enough to say that DSDs exist, are medically diverse, and require truthful care.

Biblically, congenital variation belongs to life in a creation that is good yet groaning. Scripture recognizes people whose reproductive development or sexual function differs from the majority, including eunuchs, without treating them as less human ([Isaiah 56:3-5](#); [Matthew 19:12](#); [Acts 8:26-40](#)). The category of eunuch is not identical to modern intersex conditions, so it should not be misused as a direct equivalence. It does show that atypical reproductive circumstances do not remove a person from God's concern or covenant mercy.

Medical ethics in DSD care has its own contested history. Irreversible surgeries performed in infancy for primarily cosmetic reasons have been criticized because the child cannot meaningfully participate in decisions and long-term outcomes can vary. Other interventions may be medically urgent, for example where hormonal crises or malignancy risks are involved. Recent pediatric literature emphasizes communication, psychosocial support, specialist teams, and patient or family values rather than pretending that one intervention fits every condition (Avanceña et al., 2024; Asamoah & Clagg, 2026). The church should not make categorical medical pronouncements beyond its competence.

DSD also demonstrates why the phrase “assigned sex at birth” can be either descriptive or misleading depending on context. In most births, sex is observed from anatomy rather than arbitrarily assigned. In some DSD cases, clinicians and families genuinely face complex diagnostic decisions and may use “assignment” in a more substantive sense. Precision requires acknowledging both realities.

Intersex status must also be distinguished from transgender identity. A person with a DSD may identify as male or female and may or may not experience gender dysphoria. World Health Organization materials explicitly distinguish intersex variations in sex characteristics from gender identity and sexual orientation (World Health Organization, 2021). Therefore the existence of intersex persons cannot be used as a shortcut to prove every theory of gender identity, nor should transgender people be described as intersex when they do not have a DSD.

The moral classification here is primarily one of truth, care, and medical wisdom. Being born with a DSD is not sin. Medical decisions belong to clinical ethics informed by diagnosis, necessity, risk, consent, fertility, psychological wellbeing, and long-term care. The theological affirmation of male and female creation remains, but application in atypical development may require humility about what can be known quickly. Parents need support, not suspicion.

The pastoral self-examination is directed especially at teachers and culture warriors. Do I care about intersex people, or only about what their bodies let me say in an argument? Have I repeated a prevalence figure I never verified? Do I speak as if atypical development proves God made a mistake, or as if medical complexity disappears when I quote Genesis? Scripture gives a stable creation doctrine and also gives us a moral duty not to bear false witness about difficult cases. Truth is not threatened by precision.

7.13 Children, Adolescents, and Sexual Formation

Children are not blank screens, miniature adults, or political property. They are developing persons entrusted to parents and communities who bear a duty to protect, teach, discipline, and prepare them for adult faithfulness. Scripture places formative responsibility heavily on households, commanding God's words to be taught diligently across ordinary life ([Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#)) and instructing parents to raise children in the training and instruction of the Lord ([Ephesians 6:4](#)). The church supports this task; it does not replace the family or claim secret authority over a child's body.

Sexual formation begins before explicit sexual activity because children learn what bodies mean, what privacy means, whether adults can be trusted, how boys and girls are valued, what marriage looks like, what jokes are tolerated, and whether difficult questions can be asked without shame. A child who receives no truthful formation is not thereby kept innocent. The vacuum will be filled by peers, pornography, advertising, influencers, entertainment, or predatory adults.

Age-appropriate sexual education can therefore be a form of protection. Young children can learn correct names for body parts, the difference between appropriate care and inappropriate touching, that private parts are private, that they can tell a trusted adult when something feels wrong, and that secrets involving sexual touch should be disclosed. Older children and adolescents can receive increasingly explicit teaching about puberty, fertility, consent, pornography, online grooming, sexting, boundaries, sexual ethics, marriage, and the dignity of persons. Truthfulness need not be graphic or premature.

Christian parents sometimes fear that talking about sex encourages sex. Silence can feel safer. But silence may leave a child without vocabulary to report abuse or without a theological framework when sexualized media appears. The better question is not whether children will learn about sexuality but who will disciple their understanding and whether the teaching will unite truth with safety.

Schools and public institutions create legitimate questions of parental rights, educational responsibility, safeguarding, and curriculum. Christians should evaluate actual materials rather than relying on viral screenshots or generalized panic. Some programs may teach contested assumptions about gender identity, sexual orientation, or sexual ethics as though they were morally settled. Others may simply teach anatomy, consent, abuse prevention, or anti-bullying principles Christians can affirm. Responsible opposition distinguishes what is being taught, at what age, with what parental notice, and with what evidence. A culture-war slogan is not curriculum analysis.

Media exposure is now a central part of formation. Pornographic content can arrive through search engines, social media, private messages, pop-up advertising, streaming, gaming chat, or a friend's phone. Adolescent sexting research confirms that sexual image exchange is not rare, while also showing variation across age and context (Madigan et al., 2018; Mori et al., 2019). Parents therefore need practical digital wisdom. Device rules, filters, bedroom boundaries, time limits, parental controls, and periodic review can be useful, but no software can substitute for relationship. A teenager who believes disclosure will result only in humiliation learns to hide danger.

Safeguarding must be explicit. Adults in churches, schools, sports, counseling, and ministry should follow clear policies concerning private communication, transport, one-to-one meetings, physical contact, changing areas, overnight events, and reporting concerns. Allegations of abuse should not be handled as public-relations problems. Where law requires reporting suspected abuse to civil authorities, churches should comply. Even where legal rules differ, the church should not conduct secret processes designed mainly to protect leaders. Romans 13 recognizes legitimate civil authority, and Scripture repeatedly condemns shepherds who exploit the vulnerable ([Romans 13:1-4](#); [Ezekiel 34:1-10](#)).

Adolescent sexual behavior requires pastoral differentiation. A young person exploring attraction, a teenager coerced into sex, an adolescent viewing pornography compulsively, and a couple deliberately pursuing sexual intercourse are not the same case. Discipline should aim at restoration and protection, not spectacle. Pregnancy should not be treated as public evidence that the girl is uniquely guilty while the boy disappears. A pregnant adolescent needs prenatal care, family support, truthful moral counsel, and protection from coercive abortion or forced marriage. The unborn child is not the sin.

Questions of sexual orientation and gender identity in adolescence require particular patience. Adolescence is a period of developing identity, changing bodies, peer influence, and emerging sexuality. Some young people experience persistent same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria; others experience uncertainty that later develops in different directions. Christian parents should neither panic at a disclosure nor make an immediate ideological declaration. The first response should preserve relationship: "Thank you for telling me. I love you. We will walk through this together." Love does not require agreeing with every interpretation of the experience.

Medical decisions around gender distress in minors deserve the evidentiary caution discussed above. The divergence between international professional recommendations and recent English policy changes demonstrates that clinicians themselves debate assessment pathways, evidence quality, and intervention thresholds. Parents should seek competent, transparent care that evaluates the whole child and does not treat predetermined transition or predetermined rejection as the only possible outcome. Pastors should know the limit of pastoral competence and avoid practicing medicine from the pulpit.

The church must also confront sexual abuse inside families. "Honor your father and mother" ([Exodus 20:12](#)) does not command a child to submit to sexual violation. "Do not bring shame on the family" is not biblical counsel when it conceals abuse. The command to honor authority never gives authority permission to commit evil. A child reporting abuse should be protected even when the accused is respected, ordained, wealthy, or related.

Purity teaching for adolescents should therefore center on Christ rather than fear. Teenagers need to hear that sex is a good gift with a holy place, that desire is not dirty, that boundaries are not evidence of shame, that virginity is not

salvation, that failure is not the end of their story, and that repentance is real. They also need to hear that grace is not a permission slip for experimentation. A church that only says “do not” leaves desire unexplained. A church that only says “be yourself” leaves desire ungoverned. Christian formation says: receive your body, honor others, tell the truth, flee exploitation, practice self-control, and bring every part of life under Jesus.

The moral classification includes clear commands and broad prudence. Abuse, exploitation, sexual immorality, and lying are prohibited. Parents' specific technology rules, age thresholds for devices, school choices, dating rules, and educational materials involve wisdom. The church should support parents without pretending one family's prudential boundary is God's universal law.

The question for adults is sobering: what are children learning from us before we teach a lesson? Do they see fidelity or hypocrisy? Do they hear us condemn sexual minorities while laughing at degrading jokes? Do they see phones guarded more fiercely than marriages? Are church leaders safer because we have policies, or merely trusted because of titles? Sexual formation is not only what adults say to children. It is what adults normalize in front of them.

7.14 Compassion Without Doctrinal Surrender

Sexual ethics is a test of whether Christians can hold truth and love together without turning one into a slogan against the other. Some believers fear compromise so deeply that harshness begins to look like courage. Others fear causing harm so deeply that moral clarity begins to look like cruelty. Scripture permits neither distortion. Jesus is full of grace and truth ([John 1:14](#)). Paul describes love as rejoicing with the truth, not rejoicing in wrongdoing ([1 Corinthians 13:6](#)). Truth without love becomes a weapon. Love detached from truth becomes sentimental permission.

Compassion begins by refusing contempt. Mocking gay people, transgender people, sex workers, divorced people, porn users, unmarried pregnant women, or anyone with a sexual history is incompatible with the gospel. Crude jokes, slurs, demeaning imitation, public humiliation, and gleeful descriptions of judgment do not become holy because the speaker can cite a correct doctrine. James says the tongue should not bless God and curse people made in God's likeness ([James 3:9-10](#)).

Compassion also refuses selective outrage. A congregation that speaks constantly about homosexuality but rarely about adultery, pornography, coercion, sexual abuse, divorce for convenience, lust, trafficking, or male promiscuity communicates that its moral energy is organized partly by culture rather than Scripture. The same Bible that addresses same-sex conduct also addresses heterosexual sexual immorality repeatedly. The church's credibility does not determine whether the biblical teaching is true, but hypocrisy can make the truth harder to hear and brings judgment on teachers who excuse themselves.

Doctrinal surrender, however, is not compassion. A pastor who tells an adulterous person that the affair is “authentic love,” a cohabiting couple that covenant is unnecessary, or a same-sex couple that Scripture blesses their sexual union merely because correction may wound has confused immediate emotional relief with spiritual care. The physician who hides a diagnosis to preserve today's mood has not practiced compassion. The analogy is limited, but the moral point holds: love must be governed by reality.

Pastors and teachers should fear two opposite sins. The first is to flatter people toward judgment by calling repentance “harm” whenever Scripture contradicts desire. The second is to use orthodoxy as cover for contempt, humiliation, or neglect. A shepherd who will not warn has abandoned part of the shepherd's task; a shepherd who enjoys wounding the sheep has abandoned its spirit. Biblical correction is not cruelty with verses attached, and compassion is not silence purchased at the price of truth ([Acts 20:26-31](#); [2 Timothy 4:1-5](#)). The church must be willing to lose applause rather than revise Christ, and willing to lose pride rather than weaponize Him.

The gospel of affirmation often begins with a true observation: shame can destroy people. The false step is to assume that the only cure for shame is moral approval. Biblical grace cures true guilt by atonement and false shame by truth. It can tell a rape survivor, “You are not guilty for the violence done to you.” It can tell a repentant adulterer, “Your sin was real, and Christ's blood is sufficient.” It can tell a same-sex attracted believer, “Your temptation does not make you unclean; faithfulness matters.” It can tell a person in an active same-sex relationship, “You are loved, and Christ's call reaches your sexual life.” Different wounds need different words.

Church discipline should embody this distinction. Discipline is not a mechanism for expelling embarrassing people. It is a process ordered toward repentance, protection, truth, and restoration ([Matthew 18:15-20](#); [Galatians 6:1](#)). Serious unrepentant sexual sin may require formal action, especially in leadership. But discipline that is selective, rushed, publicized unnecessarily, or detached from care can become abuse. The same process should not be used for a victim, a struggling believer asking for help, and a leader who has concealed predation.

Churches should also be careful with testimonies. A person who has left a sexual lifestyle may want to tell the story. The church should not turn that person into a permanent exhibit whose value depends on having the “right” dramatic

transformation. Nor should leaders pressure people to disclose private histories publicly. A testimony belongs to the person, and confidentiality matters.

The same applies to change claims. Some believers report meaningful changes in patterns of attraction, behavior, or identity. Their stories should not be erased. Others remain celibate while attractions persist. Their faithfulness should not be treated as a failed testimony. The church's promise is not that every believer will become heterosexual, marry, have children, or cease all temptation. The promise is Christ Himself, the Spirit's presence, a new community, the forgiveness of sins, growth in holiness, resurrection, and final freedom from the presence of sin.

Pastoral care should be concrete. The same-sex attracted believer needs friendship, vocation, hospitality, and a church family that does not make marriage the entrance fee to adulthood. The single mother needs practical support, not whispers. The divorced father needs help becoming a faithful parent. The betrayed spouse needs safety and truthful counsel. The porn user needs accountability and perhaps clinical treatment. The transgender-identifying teenager needs parents and leaders who remain close enough to hear the fear beneath the language. The trafficking survivor needs specialized care. Compassion is expensive because it stays after the argument ends.

Doctrinal clarity also requires admitting what Scripture does not say. It does not give a universal dress code for sexual holiness. It does not say every same-sex attraction is demon possession. It does not say a person with a DSD belongs to a morally suspect category. It does not identify masturbation by name. It does not provide a modern pronoun policy. It does not command abused spouses to remain in immediate danger. It does not promise that marriage cures lust. It does not teach that sexual partners exchange occult soul fragments. Refusing false teachings is part of refusing doctrinal surrender.

The moral classification of compassion is not optional. Love of neighbor is a command ([Matthew 22:37-40](#)). Truthfulness is a command ([Ephesians 4:25](#)). Gentleness in correction is commanded ([2 Timothy 2:24-26](#)). Sexual holiness is commanded ([1 Thessalonians 4:3-8](#)). Christians therefore do not possess liberty to choose truth without love or love without truth. The precise tone, timing, language, and relational strategy often require wisdom, but the goal is fixed: restore people to communion with God in truth.

The final test is personal. Am I more troubled by being called hateful than by the possibility of withholding truth? Am I more troubled by cultural compromise than by the cruelty in my own heart? Do I use “grace” to avoid costly confrontation, or “truth” to avoid costly compassion? Do I secretly enjoy another person's sin because it makes my own look respectable? The gospel dismantles both superiorities. At the foot of the cross, no one arrives as the morally interesting exception. We arrive as sinners who need mercy.

7.15 Sexual Sin Is Neither Unforgivable nor Harmless

Sexual sin is powerful enough to wound bodies, bind memories, fracture marriages, expose children, spread disease, exploit vulnerability, distort imagination, and harden consciences. It is not harmless. Scripture does not treat sexual immorality as an outdated private preference. Paul tells believers to flee it and reminds them that the body belongs to Christ ([1 Corinthians 6:18-20](#)). He warns churches not to be deceived about patterns of unrighteousness while immediately proclaiming the cleansing that has already reached people with such histories ([1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#)). The warning and the hope stand beside each other.

That conjunction is the closing burden of this chapter. Sexual sin is neither trivial nor uniquely damning. The church has sometimes acted as though sexual failure creates a permanent class of stained Christians. Scripture does not. David's adultery and bloodguilt brought devastating consequences and severe discipline, yet his repentance is preserved as a prayer for cleansing ([2 Samuel 11:1-12:25](#); [Psalm 51:1-17](#)). The Samaritan woman's complex marital history did not prevent Jesus from offering living water ([John 4:7-26](#)). The Corinthian church contained people whose former lives included serious sexual sin, yet Paul could say, “you were washed... sanctified... justified” in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God ([1 Corinthians 6:11](#)).

The gospel therefore rejects “damaged goods” theology. A person who has fornicated, committed adultery, used pornography, sold sex, purchased sex, participated in same-sex relationships, undergone transition procedures, sent explicit images, or made other sexual choices is not beyond the reach of Christ. Some consequences may remain. A scar may remain. A child may need lifelong care. A marriage may not be restored. An image may still circulate. A surgery may be irreversible. A criminal sentence may be just. Forgiveness does not erase history as though nothing happened. It does remove condemnation for those who are in Christ and begins a new life of truth ([Romans 8:1](#); [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

The sexually sinned-against need an equally clear gospel. If you were raped, abused, groomed, trafficked, coerced, exposed to pornography, or betrayed, the act committed against you is not your sexual sin. Your body did not become morally polluted because another person violated it. Trauma responses, numbness, fear, intrusive memories, bodily reactions, or difficulty with intimacy are not proof that you consented. You may need specialized clinical care, safe relationships, lament, legal support, and time. The church should not demand a quick testimony of victory. Christ is not impatient with wounds.

The sexually struggling believer also needs precision. A Christian who hates a sin, confesses it, takes steps to resist it, seeks help, and sometimes falls is not in the same posture as a person who celebrates the sin, demands its affirmation, and rejects correction. Chapter 4 developed this distinction between struggle and settled rebellion. It must be carried here. Repeated failure is serious and may reveal weak repentance, inadequate safeguards, untreated compulsion, or deeper unbelief. But the presence of battle is not the same thing as peace with sin. John writes so that believers will not sin and then immediately says that if anyone does sin, “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one” ([1 John 2:1-2](#)).

The sexually presumptuous person must hear the other half. Grace is not an argument for keeping a lover, porn account, secret chat, purchased sexual arrangement, or identity claim beyond Christ's authority. “God knows my heart” is not reassuring when the heart is being used to overrule His Word. “We are committed” does not turn fornication into marriage. “We love each other” does not turn adultery into covenant. “I was born this way” does not make every desire holy. “I have a diagnosis” does not make every response to distress morally obligatory. “I prayed a prayer years ago” does not make present rebellion spiritually irrelevant. Jesus' warning remains: not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” enters the kingdom ([Matthew 7:21-23](#)).

The self-righteous conservative must also be stripped of refuge. You may be heterosexual, married, monogamous in public, opposed to same-sex marriage, and still be far from God. You may have never had intercourse outside marriage and still live by lust. You may condemn transgender ideology while humiliating your spouse. You may preach family values while exploiting employees, lying, gossiping, or worshiping money. Sexual orthodoxy is not the narrow gate. Jesus Christ is.

Repentance therefore has concrete shape. If there is an affair, end it. If pornography is hidden, bring it into trusted light. If sexual images are being used to threaten someone, stop and submit to accountability. If you purchased sex, repent of treating a person as a commodity. If you are cohabiting sexually outside marriage, stop using future intention as present permission. If you are abusing someone, separate from access to the victim and face civil as well as church accountability. If you are manipulating a counselee, student, employee, congregant, or child for sexual access, the issue is not merely private morality. It is exploitation.

If you are a pastor, elder, teacher, counselor, employer, or ministry founder who has used spiritual authority, money, grades, employment, prophecy, or pastoral access to obtain sexual compliance, do not call exposure an attack on the ministry. Do not ask the victim to protect “the work of God.” Step away from access to those you can exploit, tell the truth, preserve evidence, cooperate with safeguarding and lawful investigation, and accept that forgiveness does not create an automatic right to return to office. The name of Christ must never be used to negotiate secrecy for predation ([Ezekiel 34:1-10](#); [1 Peter 5:1-4](#)). Repentance seeks light even when the light is costly.

Repentance also has a positive horizon. The adulterer must learn fidelity. The porn user must learn to see persons rather than content. The sexually wounded person may learn safe intimacy. The same-sex attracted Christian may build deep friendship and a fruitful celibate life. The divorced believer may become faithful in present responsibilities. The person with gender dysphoria may need patient help receiving the body rather than fighting it alone. The church should become a household in which obedience is costly but not solitary.

This is where identity finds its final answer. The gospel does not say, “You are whatever your worst sexual act says.” It also does not say, “You are whatever your strongest sexual desire says.” It says that everyone who is united to Christ belongs to Him. Paul can list ethnic, social, and sex distinctions and then declare believers one in Christ without erasing creaturely particularity ([Galatians 3:26-29](#)). Colossians tells believers to put old practices to death because they have put on the new self ([Colossians 3:1-11](#)). New identity is not a slogan by which temptation vanishes. It is a new lordship from which sanctification proceeds.

Assurance must remain centered there. The grounds of salvation are not successful sexual self-management. A tender believer who is fighting temptation should not stare endlessly at the quality of his or her victory as if Christ's righteousness rises and falls with each day. Assurance rests first in the finished work and promise of Jesus Christ, received through faith. Yet assurance is not indifferent to fruit. A life that repeatedly protects sexual rebellion, rejects correction, and demands peace without repentance has reason to tremble. The same Scripture that says there is no condemnation in Christ also says that those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires ([Romans 8:3](#); [Galatians 5:24](#)).

Sexual holiness is also eschatological. Paul places sanctification in sexual conduct beside the hope of Christ's return ([1 Thessalonians 4:3-8](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)). Titus says saving grace trains God's people to deny worldly desires while waiting for the blessed hope ([Titus 2:11-14](#)). For believers who understand the Blessed Hope in pre-tribulation terms, this should produce neither date-setting nor obsessive speculation. It should produce readiness. The question is not whether cultural sexual confusion proves an exact prophetic timetable. The question is whether Christ could find His people awake, faithful, repentant, and refusing the moral anesthesia of the age.

The final image is therefore not the courtroom of social media, where people are either affirmed without question or condemned without mercy. It is the cross and the empty tomb. At the cross, sexual sin is serious enough that it cannot

be renamed away. At the cross, sexual sinners are loved enough that the Son of God bears judgment for all who trust Him. At the empty tomb, the body is not disposable, desire is not sovereign, and death is not final. Resurrection announces that God's answer to our disordered embodied life is not self-hatred or self-deification but redemption.

If you are hiding, come into the light. If you are ashamed, come to Christ. If you are defending what God calls sin, stop defending it and come to Christ. If Christians have wounded you while claiming His name, do not confuse their sin with His character. If you are weary from resisting a desire you did not choose, do not interpret the battle as proof that He has abandoned you. If you have failed again, confess without bargaining and receive the Advocate. If you have built a theology whose main purpose is to prevent God from contradicting your sexuality, allow the Word to search you. Do not ask Jesus to become the chaplain of a relationship, identity, or practice you refuse to place under His Word.

The broad road in Christian clothing offers two false peaces. One says, "Your sexual choices do not matter because grace will cover whatever you refuse to surrender." The other says, "You are safe because your sexual life looks respectable." Jesus destroys both refuges. He calls sinners through the narrow gate of Himself, gives a righteousness they did not earn, gives the Holy Spirit they could not manufacture, and teaches the redeemed to live as people whose bodies and desires have a Lord.

Sexual sin is not unforgivable. Sexual sin is not harmless. The sexually pure are not self-saved. The sexually broken are not beyond cleansing. The sexually tempted are not uniquely condemned. The sexually rebellious are not safely affirmed by changing the vocabulary. Christ is better than every counterfeit. His mercy is deep enough to forgive, His truth is strong enough to correct, His Spirit is powerful enough to sanctify, His church is called to become a household for costly faithfulness, and His return is near enough that no cherished rebellion is worth keeping.

The chapter therefore ends where every warning in this book must end: not with sexuality as the center, but with Jesus Christ. He is the Bridegroom who gave Himself for His church, the Savior who cleanses His people, the Lord who commands their bodies, the Advocate for those who confess, the Judge before whom secrets will be exposed, and the coming King for whom His people prepare. Blessed assurance is not the confidence that desire has been affirmed. It is the confidence that the crucified and risen Christ is sufficient, that those who belong to Him may come boldly for mercy, and that the grace which pardons also teaches us to say no to ungodliness while we wait for His appearing.

Come to Him. Tell the truth. Leave the hiding place. Receive mercy. Walk in holiness. Stay awake.

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