My Own Worst Enemy

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If men are as depraved and sexually self-serving as many claim to be, then what are we? Their pure, innocent, nonsexual prey? I don’t think so. I am a woman and I am a Christian. If you ask me, I am the enemy. It’s not my point to paint women as worse than men or to paint men as worse than women. I just want to stop pointing the finger at the other gender and to take a deep look inside myself.

There are some things it is helpful for me to understand about guys, but a lot of the information they give (e.g., that they’re visual, lustful, and sexobsessed) doesn’t always help me in my quest to stay pure. On a good day, I want to help them in their battle; on a bad day, I’m going to use these facts against them to get what I want.

And what I want cannot be captured on a bumper sticker. Someone somewhere came up with this phrase, and it’s been way overused: Men give love to get sex and women give sex to get love. I wish it were that simple. What I hear in this is that men want sex and women want love. I can’t speak to the male side of this platitude, but I can speak to the female side.

Yes, I want love, but I want so much more. I want love and sex and intimacy and the feeling of being desired.

I want a relationship with a man—a boyfriend who might become a husband. I want to feel attractive and sexy. I want to be powerful and tender and independent and dependent. I want to be cared for and able to care. I want romance. I want to be respected and cherished. I want to be enjoyed and delighted in. I want a man to want me but not need me, but I want to be needed and to have my needs met. I want to be adored but not worshiped. I want to be sexually aroused. I want to be pure. I want to be physically intimate, because I want a man to love me. But sometimes I want to be physically intimate because I want to be physically intimate.

Women are complex. At least I am.

Men are too, really. I had a boyfriend who admitted that he wanted more than just a sexual encounter—he wanted to feel powerful (because he could arouse a woman) and he wanted to feel desired and admired and respected. On the outside, he appeared pretty simple—feed him, give him a U2 CD, and satisfy his sexual passion, and he’s a happy camper. But peel back the layers and there is so much more: the complicated soul of a man.

But I digress. This is not about men; it’s about women. It’s about women and sex and all the things we long for. And when it comes to sex, it’s about how we are our own worst enemy. But this is true only if our ultimate desire is for Jesus and for loving and honoring Him. One of the definitions of an enemy on dictionary.com is one who “intends injury to, or opposes the interests of another.” If we are women who love Jesus with all our heart, mind, and soul, then we injure ourselves and oppose our greatest interest if we use our sexuality in a way that doesn’t delight Christ. And then, as Godloving women, we become
our own worst enemy.

SPELL IT OUT

Let me define my use of the word sex before we continue. When I say “sex” in this article, I do not just mean intercourse. I am including here all that is sexual and physical in our relationships with men. I mean kissing and all that follows. You may never have intercourse, but you might have an extremely sexual relationship with a man. I have heard sexual immorality defined as creating a desire that cannot righteously be fulfilled. And ultimately, the fire we play with before actual intercourse is foreplay—it’s meant to lead us to the ultimate sex act. But all of it is sexual.

Sex is not bad or evil. I just think it has a safe place to be explored and enjoyed—marriage. I believe that Jesus delights in our sexuality and in sex. He created both. He made us women and men. He made sex for pleasure and procreation and intimacy.

We are women. We delight our Creator when we delight in being made as women. We delight Him when we act and dress like women. This does not mean we have to cook and sew and never wear jeans, but it does mean we enjoy our femininity. We enjoy looking like women. We aren’t ashamed of our bodies. We don’t need to dress like Britney Spears, but we’re not wearing our grandmother’s muumuu either.

We are sexual beings. As we mature, our bodies are wired to want sex. We will get aroused and our bodies will desire a physical intimacy that matches our desire for emotional intimacy. What is beautiful is that sex was God’s idea and it is a powerful picture of His intimate relationship with His bride, the church. God initiates with us and enters us through the Holy Spirit, and, with trust, we receive Him. There is great joy and pleasure in this relationship.

Theologically, we know our relationship with God to be a covenant relationship. This means that His relationship with us is a committed relationship and our intimacy is enjoyed in and as a result of this commitment. He promises to never leave us or forsake us (i.e., there’s no divorce). He is safe. God will never embarrass or shame us.

Sex was designed to be enjoyed and experienced in the context of a covenant like this called marriage. But most people today don’t really like that idea. They don’t like limits on their freedom.

FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

My dog, Grace, loves to dig and escape from our backyard. In this backyard there is grass to roll in, water to drink, a porch for shade, toys to enjoy, and a fence to keep her safe. But Grace doesn’t see it this way. Through her dog eyes, the fence keeps her from all kinds of great adventures. Through my eyes, the fence keeps her from ending up a bloody mess of fur with a tire track over her sweet little nose. To me, the fence protects; to Grace, the fence prohibits.

To most of the world, God’s mandate to restrict sexual activity to a marriage relationship is prohibiting. It’s seems so limiting, so 1864. To God, it’s protection. It protects the holiness of the sex act. It protects the intimacy and fidelity of a marriage. It protects the goodness and beauty of what He has created. It protects His glory. But most of us are like my dog. We see limits as confining, legalistic, absurd. And the only way I can explain this mindset is by understanding my sin. At the heart of sin is rebellion toward the person and purposes of God. We don’t trust God. We don’t trust that His decrees are for our good. We’re suspicious. We’re convinced He’s withholding something. As soon as He says no, we find ourselves saying, “But I must.” Why is it I want to pull every fire alarm I see if it happens to have a Don’t Touch sign across the plated glass? For this discussion to have any significance, then, God must matter and His purposes and provisions must matter.

PREVIOUSLY ENGAGED

I started loving God when I was seventeen. It was then that I became a Christian. Some would say I “married Jesus,” which seems like a cheesy way of saying that I joined myself to Him in a covenant relationship. I placed my trust in Him to be all that He says He is: God and Savior and the only One able to abolish the consequence of my sin.

Being married to Jesus does sound cheesy. It sounds like something Gretchen Slavinsky might have said.

Gretchen was a self-righteous girl at my high school who used to tell all the kids who smoked pot before first period that they needed to be saved or they were going to hell. I think they were too stoned to care, but she’d say stuff like that. I can still hear her saying in a pious tone, “I’d never listen to Zeppelin. I’m married
But if I can get Gretchen’s voice out of my head, then the image of being married to Jesus is helpful. To be a Christian is to be the bride of Christ. I belong to Him in the way a wife belongs to a husband and a husband belongs to a wife. We are Christ’s greatest priority and He is ours. He loves us; we love Him. This is the reason the Bible often compares our propensity to sin as adultery—we’re messing around on our soul mate, our husband, our first love.

THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE

If it is our greatest desire to love and honor Christ, then when we oppose this desire, we are our own worst enemy. And this is definitely true when we dishonor His purposes for sex. Let me suggest three ways we do this:

1. We use sex as a shortcut to intimacy. In any dating relationship, we desire to feel close, connected, and known, and it is a temptation to speed this process up by being physical. But anyone who has tried this fast track knows that the connection is fleeting and the physical closeness doesn’t satisfy the desire to be truly known. The reality is that it can create even greater insecurity. We wonder, Does he really love me or does he just like making out? and Do I really like him or do I just like having someone to kiss?

For a woman, true intimacy comes first from being known and enjoyed. Wisdom would say that physical intimacy should not get ahead of emotional intimacy, but unfortunately we often listen to movies and sitcoms more than wisdom. Our favorite shows tell us that we’re not intimate until we’ve had sex. So we let sex, rather than long conversations and emotional connection, inform us that we’re close.

2. We use sex to feel attractive and wanted and feminine. If you have any insecurity about your attractiveness or desirability—and it seems most of us do—then this will be a great temptation. And this is when that information about guys being depraved and sexually self-serving plays into our court. If we are dating a guy who desires to follow Jesus and keep the relationship pure, there is something wicked in us (at least in some of us) that wants to push him to the point where he’s a bit out of control and has to pull back because we’re just so sexy and desirable. Unfortunately, he doesn’t always pull back. But for that fleeting moment, we get to feel just what we wanted to feel.

And then, in a twisted way, we lose all respect for him. Can I explain it? Not really, but I know it to be true. The self-serving guy thing allows me to put all the blame on him. Unconsciously, I decide that if he were worthy of respect, he would have stopped us. In a strange, sadistic, selfish, and most often unconscious way, I have set him up to fail the test.

3. We use sex to get a man and try to hold on to him. Welcome to the world of insecurities and fears. Desperately, we want a relationship, but comparison rears its ugly head. The girl next door is a supermodel, and for those of us who are not, depression and desperation set in. To stave off the sadness, we look into our little bag of tricks and pull out the dagger of sexuality: If I can’t give him the girl off the magazine cover, then maybe I can give him my body and that will hold him. If it takes dressing like I forgot to put clothes on over these undergarments, then that’s what I’ll do, dadgummit! Anything to not be alone one more Saturday night watching the complete third season of the Gilmore Girls on DVD.

Unfortunately, this strategy can work and we find ourselves married to a man who is as far from being our soul mate as Jude Law is from being our husband. When only the physical holds a couple together while dating, it often implodes in marriage and we find ourselves in a hard place.

HELP

I have no formula for getting out of this cycle of self-destruction. I know it starts with Jesus. I know this picture of being married to Him is helpful to me. I’m a romantic—I believe in being true to the one I love, in staying together and honoring one another. I believe in not messing around. And I believe that sexual purity begins with loving Jesus. My mother scared me into staying a virgin during my adolescence. I didn’t want an STD and I didn’t want to get pregnant and have to drop out of school and work at the Piggly Wiggly to support my baby. I didn’t want to get naked with some random high school crush who would never really love me, then have to introduce him to my husband at the ten-year class reunion.

Then I went to college and mom’s scary scenarios didn’t seem to have the same effect. Call it love. Call it hormones. But the urge to merge seemed much more intense after I left home. In college and beyond, it
was my love for Christ that kept me pure. Maybe I’m starting to sound like Gretchen Slavinsky, but it’s the truth. I can remember driving alone down Airport Boulevard in the midst of one relationship and crying out, “Jesus, You’d better be real, because my love for You is the only reason I’m not having sex.”

For me, loving Jesus is the starting point. Loving the Bible and believing it’s true is also key. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:1 that “it is good for a man not to touch a woman” (nasb). This could be translated “for a man not to touch a woman in a married way (a sexual way).” This is where it’s suggested that sexual immorality might be defined more broadly than just intercourse—any touch that leads to sexual desire that cannot be righteously fulfilled might be considered sexual immorality.

Again, most of the kissing and touching we do is technically foreplay and it’s playing with fire. The wise man in Proverbs 6:27, 29 asks,

“Can a man take a fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned? ... So is the one who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; Whoever touches her will not go unpunished. “

The author of Hebrews put it this way: “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (13:4). Now, there’s a warm, fuzzy verse to puff-paint on the side of your mug.

Ever wonder about God’s will for your life? The answer shows up in 1 Thessalonians 4, and it is anything but veiled. Paul clearly states, “This is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like [those] who don’t know God” (verses 3-5).

Sanctification is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ, and if we are to look more and more like Him, we are to abstain from sexual immorality. Basically, being sexually immoral—taking sex out of its proper context—doesn’t look like Jesus. To look like Jesus is to be pure and holy and righteous, fully submitted to the Father. If I want to look like Jesus (and I do) but I use sex outside its design, then I am my own worst enemy—I have opposed what I desire most, which is to imitate and love my Savior and bring glory and honor to Him.

So I want to fall more in love with Jesus. I want to seek to live out a life that is honoring to Him in this sex-is-everywhere-and-only-weird-people-are-still-virgins world. I need to confess my selfishness and idolatry (because wanting a relationship with a man is often the thing I bow down to most in this life). I need to pray. I need to ask some friends to pray for me. I need to go to church. I need to find a small group of people to encourage me on this path. And I need to avoid doing stupid stuff with guys. I also need to work on emotional intimacy—the process of knowing and being known. I need to memorize some Scripture. I need to date guys who love Jesus too. And—did I mention?—I need to stay away from doing stupid stuff with guys. Nobody wants to be their own worst enemy.

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