

❖ Other Voices ❖

Let's get down to brass tacks. What is chastity? One way of putting it is that chastity is doing sex in the Body of Christ—doing sex in a way that befits the Body of Christ, and that keeps you grounded, and bounded, and in the community. As we've seen, that means sex only within marriage—which means, in turn, abstinence if you're not married, and fidelity if you are....

Chastity is something you do, it is something you practice. It is not only a state—the state of *being chaste*—but a disciplined, active undertaking that we *do* as part of the Body. It is not the mere absence of sex but an active conforming of one's body to the arc of the gospel.

LAUREN F. WINNER, *REALSEX: THE NAKED TRUTH ABOUT CHASTITY* (2005)

Virtue is not an absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell.... Chastity does not mean abstention from sexual wrong; it means something flaming, like Joan of Arc.

G. K. CHESTERTON, "A PIECE OF CHALK" (1905)

Those who are chaste are fully at peace with their bodies and their sexuality. Chastity is not best seen as the ability to keep oneself from violating the sexual "rules"; rather, it is "a dynamic principle enabling one to use one's sexual powers intelligently in the pursuit of human flourishing and happiness."

If chastity is a virtue, it is an aspect of character that a person can aspire to, achieve, stray from, regain. Notice that when the virtue at the top of this spectrum is chastity, there are three different ways of being unchaste—continence, incontinence and the vice of lustfulness.

CAROLINE J. SIMON, *BRINGING SEX INTO FOCUS: THE QUEST FOR SEXUAL INTEGRITY* (2012)

The virtue of chastity is so named because it is that which "chastises" the concupiscence that comes from venereal pleasure. As in the case of the other moral virtues, chastity does not eliminate one's appetites or passions, but moderates them, enabling them to be governed by practical reason informed by prudence and in this way ordered to the true good of the person.

JOHN S. GRABOWSKI, *SEX AND VIRTUE: AN INTRODUCTION TO SEXUAL ETHICS* (2012)

I can write with authority, because I've experienced nonmarital sex and I've experienced chastity, and I know what lies at the core of each.

Both experiences are centered on a kind of faith. One of them, sex before marriage, relies on faith that a man who has not shown faith in you – that is, not enough faith to commit himself to you for life – will come around through the persuasive force of your physical affection. It forces you to follow a set of Darwinian social rules – dressing and acting a certain way to outperform other women competing for mates. A man who's attracted to you will eventually learn who you really are – but by then, if all goes according to the rules, your hooks will be in too deep for him to escape.

The other experience, chastity, relies on faith that God, as you pursue a closer walk with Him, will lead you to a loving husband. Chastity opens up your world, enabling you to achieve your creative and spiritual potential without the pressure of having to play the dating game. Your husband will love you for yourself – your heart, mind, body, and soul.

When faced with a choice between two attitudes – both of which require looking beyond present reality – I choose the one that has a solid foundation.

DAWN EDEN, *THE THRILL OF THE CHASTE* (2006)

Chastity is one of the many Christian practices that are at odds with the dictates of our surrounding, secular culture. It challenges the movies we watch, the magazines we read, the songs we listen to. It runs counter to the way many of our non-Christian friends organize their lives. It strikes most secular folk as curious (at best), strange, backwards, repressed.

Chastity is also something that many of us Christians have to learn. I had to learn chastity because I became a Christian as an adult, after my sexual expectations and mores were already partly formed. But even many folks who grow up in good Christian homes, attending good Christian schools, and hanging out with good Christian friends – even these Christians-from-the-cradle often need to learn chastity, because unchaste assumptions govern so much of contemporary society.

LAUREN F. WINNER, *REALSEX: THE NAKED TRUTH ABOUT CHASTITY* (2005)

We need to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the beauty of chastity, and we can begin by admitting that it is something we only dimly understand. Rather than trying to think for ourselves, we should listen to the community of faith before us, around the world and through time. They knew something we didn't know.

We live in a reckless age that is amnesic and self-fascinated. Welding together fresh opinions in the basement will not solve this problem. We need to take the time to listen to the wisdom of our forebears in faith – and, harder still, to find the courage to put it into practice. If they are right, in practicing chastity we will begin to experience healing joy. Then, perhaps, we'll find the words for it.

FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN, "SEX AND SAINTS: A NEW VOCABULARY FOR AN OVERSEXUALIZED CULTURE," *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* (2000)

Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues. There is no getting away from it: the old Christian rule is, “Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence.” Now this is so difficult and so contrary to our instincts, that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it now is, has gone wrong. One or the other. Of course, being a Christian, I think it is the instinct which has gone wrong.

C. S. LEWIS, “SEXUAL MORALITY,” *MERE CHRISTIANITY* (1943)

People who understand the Bible’s vision for sex also understand that the physical union of a man and a woman is more a sign than it is a destination. It is not an end in itself. Sex is symbolic as much as it is real. It represents a holistic approach to nakedness, full and reciprocal transparency in which man and woman are fully exposed yet not rejected, fully known yet completely embraced.

SCOTT SAULS, *JESUS OUTSIDE THE LINES: A WAY FORWARD FOR THOSE WHO ARE TIRED OF TAKING SIDES* (2015)

Sex is not just about sex. The way we understand and express our sexuality points to our deepest-held convictions about who we are, who God is, the meaning of love, the ordering of society, and even the ordering of the universe.

CHRISTOPHER WEST, *THEOLOGY OF THE BODY FOR BEGINNERS: A BASIC INTRODUCTION TO POPE JOHN PAUL II’S SEXUAL REVOLUTION* (2004)

We are now in a context where there are likely to be significantly more single people than marrieds in the church. At the same time, social sexual mores are loosening such that the church increasingly stands alone in expecting people to limit genital sex to marital relationships. What does Jesus’ celibacy have to say to our obsessions with sexual expression?

DEBRA HIRSCH, *REDEEMING SEX: NAKED CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY* (2015)

Vibrant Christian communities where married couples and celibates live side by side in deep friendships could be a powerful countercultural sign, witnessing to the fact—almost unbelievable to many of our contemporaries—that clear limits set to the bodily expression of love do not keep one from finding happiness and fulfillment.

BROTHER JOHN OF TAIZÉ, *FRIENDS IN CHRIST: PATHS TO A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH* (2012)

Our sexual lives are ways of life we live into because our hearts and minds have been captivated by a picture of the so-called good life.... Our loves and longings and desires—including our sexual longings—are not just biological instincts; they are learned. But the pedagogies of desire that train us rarely look like lectures or sermons. We learn to love on the register of the imagination.

JAMES K. A. SMITH, “FORWARD,” IN JONATHAN GRANT, *DIVINE SEX: A COMPELLING VISION FOR CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN A HYPER-SEXUALIZED AGE* (2015)