

Understanding the Nature of Sensuality at Work



TANYA WAS FUMING! MARK AND JACKSON WOULD be flying to San Jose the following week to make a huge presentation to the Fortune 500 company who had just signed on as their biggest customer. This was Tanya's project, and she'd spent weeks putting together the proposal that ultimately won the contract. Now, though, because of the squirming of an owner's wife, Tanya would be staying in Biloxi while Mark and Jackson launched the program in California.

Mark hadn't even worked on the proposal, and he'd have to cram to be up to speed on the project.

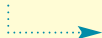
But there, in the owner's office, she was told point-blank that she couldn't travel to California because she was a woman. The owner had even compounded the insult by telling her if she weren't so attractive, it probably wouldn't even be an issue.

Nevertheless, his wife had been reading about the special temptations men and women who travel face and decided her husband should make a policy in the firm against it.

The owner, never a strong one anyway, acquiesced, leaving Tanya on the outside looking in. Since Tanya was also a member of his wife's church, the owner pointed out, he was certain she would understand.

What should Tanya do?

What should the owner have done?



Scripture Passages

Hebrews 4:12-13

Psalms 119:9-11

II Corinthians 5:20

II Timothy 2:22

Exodus 20:14

Hebrews 13:4

I Corinthians 6:9-10

Matthew 15:19

I Corinthians 6:18

Matthew 15:19

Leviticus 18:22

Romans 1:24,26,27

Matthew 5:27-28

Exodus 20:17

Study

“Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

II Timothy 2:22

The workplace offers many opportunities for Christians to engage in inappropriate sexual behavior. From affairs between unmarried coworkers to pornography on office computers to the infidelity and travel temptations, the dangers of workplace sensuality cannot be easily dismissed from our radar screens. In fact, the more successful and enjoyable our working relationships are, the greater the temptation that camaraderie, teamwork and shared missions can lead to intimacy that leads to temptation that leads to sin.

This isn't to suggest that men and women shouldn't work together or that they shouldn't travel together, though many would argue for those ideas. The reality of the workplace today, though, is that those are often not options for the Christian to consider. Equality of opportunity on the job means that anything one gender can do must be available to the other gender, and this includes opportunity to work in close quarters on projects and to travel.

A faith/work manual that fails to take this into account is out of touch with today's workplace.

Like lying in the previous study, sexual sin masquerades itself as choice in our society, and cloaks itself in cultural respectability. As Christians we are called to shun all forms of lust and to battle fiercely the tempestuous forces which our own flesh, and even Satan, unleash on our lives.

Too often, though, we spend our time and attention on other people's sexual sin instead of our own private struggles. Or we launch an attack on one kind of sexual sin while being guilty of a different sexual sin ourselves. This is particularly true in the cultural debates around homosexuality. While it's true the Bible clearly defines homosexuality as sin, it also clearly defines any sexual relationships outside of marriage between a man and a woman as sexual sin, including lust and pornography.

When Jesus tells us through Scripture to deal with the "log in our own eyes instead of the speck" in someone else's eye, He's offering us not only good wisdom for living holy lives, but also teaching us a way to minister to others. Someone who honestly wants to resist the lure of pornography, homosexuality, lust, cohabitation outside of marriage, adultery and other sins won't likely be helped by the abuse and ridicule we tend to heap on them. We know that because of our own battles with sexual temptation and sin.

So what does work? How can we help others resist sexual sin, including the office romances that shatter many marriages?

Only by addressing the temptations in ourselves, understanding the nature and power they have over us, and understanding how to resist them in our own lives, can we be useful in helping others avoid similar battles. Why is this true?

Why isn't the slogan "hate the sin but love the sinner" working?

Let's begin with a quick review of what the Bible deems to be sinful sexuality:

Adultery — Exodus 20:14, Hebrews 13:4, I Corinthians 6:9-10 (notice the sins are linked together in seriousness), Matthew 15:19

Sex among unmarried people — I Corinthians 6:18, Matthew 15:19

Homosexuality — Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:24,26,27

Pornography / lust — Matthew 5:27-28

Coveting — Exodus 20:17

Increasingly, Western culture seeks to diminish the definition of sin. While adultery, unmarried sex and homosexuality may be gaining cultural acceptability, the Bible remains unchanged in its definition of what is not appropriate in God's eyes. The real danger doesn't lie with what the culture says is okay, but with what churches and individual Christians accept as okay in their own testimonies to Christ and truth.

Further, we cannot be harder on one sexual sin than another. While we may view same-sex partners as outside of God's approval, so too are heterosexual partners engaging in sex outside of marriage outside of God's approval. Sin is sin is sin. That we shout louder about one sin over another is a mistake that makes discussions emotional instead of life-changing.

In order to understand how to cope with our own struggles, we'll examine the most common sexual sin: lust.

Describe what ideas the following verses suggest for wrestling with lust and other sexual sin.

Hebrews 4:12-13

Psalms 119:9-11

II Corinthians 5:20

II Timothy 2:22

List the times and places you are most often tempted.

Now review the list you've made above. Which ones can you avoid?

Over and over again, the Bible describes our duty to remove ourselves from temptations we understand are bigger than us. This means there may be men who should not travel with women and vice-versa, for example. Rather than making policies that shield us from our weaknesses, we have to be prepared to say no to situations that put us at risks greater than we can handle ... and to accept the price our careers must pay for saying no.

But what about the ones you can't avoid?

Remember that everywhere you are, you testify for or against Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). When your eyes check out members of the opposite sex, other people are watching you, and often delight in catching you in your lust—or are disgusted or disappointed by it. You'll be surprised how often not looking testifies for Christ.

Finally, it is essential for us to identify the area of sexual sin that has its most significant grip on our lives. Or, if sexual sin has no hold, then we must identify another sin we have difficulty controlling. This is a vital part of understanding why others struggle with a particular sin. The stranglehold we experience in our lives in one area is often the stranglehold others experience in fighting off pornography, homosexuality and even infidelity. We must never condone these behaviors. But we can help others caught in those traps better when we understand the hold certain sins have on us.

Like breaking an addiction to alcohol or drugs, support—not condemnation—is the most powerful tool. (Note: This assumes, of course, that the person we're trying to help wants to fight off this sin. There is a place for confronting someone who denies the sin in their lives, but such action *must* be characterized by compassion.)

For further consideration

The verses below are placed here as continuing reflections on this study. While groups are certainly invited to use them in their sessions, we hope that you will go home and read these passages as an exercise in encountering your Bible in private.

II Corinthians 10:5

Romans 12:1-2

I Peter 1:13-14

Philippians 4:8

Accountability is one key way to tackle the issues involved in lust. Do you have people in your life you trust enough to discuss these areas? Describe one way you plan to raise these issues with them.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- How we confront our own sexual temptations and sins offers insights for helping others with theirs.
- The most effective tool in resisting temptation is a working knowledge of Scripture.
- Just because something is legal doesn't mean it is moral.
- The Bible defines sin, not we, and certainly not our culture.
- There's no such thing as victimless sin.
- Failing in matters of sexual temptation is a poor testimony of the work of Christ in our lives.
- Sometimes we have to remove ourselves from circumstances that overwhelm us with temptation, even when we pay a price for doing so.
- Our condemnation of other people is seldom an effective first step in their redemption.