

HOW FAR IS *TOO FAR*?

This question is often asked with regard to certain behaviors. A teenage boy wants to know if holding his teenage girlfriend's hand is sinful. A fiancé wants to know if kissing his soon-to-be bride is too much physical contact, and thus sinful. An adolescent wonders if frequenting a chat room or late night web surfing is too far.

The problem with this question (and the questioners who ask it) is its underlying premise, which is insidiously self-centered. The question behind the question, more often than not, is, *How much self-gratification can I get away with?* The Bible never answers that self-centered question because it never once allows us to think that we own our lives and can use our minds and the members of our bodies for whatever self-serving purpose *up to a certain point*.

Instead, God gives us two broad commandments that encompass the whole of our responsibility: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). Through the sweeping first commandment, God claims for Himself the totality of YOU. This Godward direction is to be the focus of your life. Note that the second commandment (love your neighbor as yourself), like the first, is other-oriented and an imitation of God's own love for His people.

With this in mind, do you see how the question *How far is too far?* simply misses the point that life is not about you, nor about your desires, nor your pleasure-seeking, nor your libido. Life is about GOD, and the comprehensive worship of God in your actions, thoughts, conversations, marriage, finances, work, time-management, home, goals, and the rest of your life. Instead of "How far is too far?" ask, "Am I putting God first in my life? And how can I tell?"

Because we are temples of the Holy Spirit (that is, God's holy dwelling place), the Bible calls us to a zero-tolerance attitude regarding sexual immorality (that is, any sexual activity outside of the marriage of one husband to one wife). The NIV translation puts Ephesians 5:3 well when it says, "But among you *there must not be even a hint* of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (emphasis added).

"Not even a hint." Not the sinful action, not the sinful desires that lead to the actions, not the impure thoughts that fuel those sinful desires, not immodesty, not carelessness with our eyes, not discontentment with life—none of these is to be found among the holy people of God. Not even a hint of filth. We are wholly for, and holy unto, God alone. The Heidelberg Catechism answers the question (109), "Does God, in [the seventh] commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?" with these words: "We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why He forbids everything which incites unchastity [sexual immorality], whether it be actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires."

Life in Christ is liberating. It frees you from the brooding, selfishly pensive, downward spiral of thinking about and seeking your own satisfaction, whether as an unmarried person or married person. Life in Christ frees you now to think creatively about how to serve God in all things, and how to love your neighbor as yourself.

