

Outside of Marriage: Touching

Proverbs 6:29 “So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent.”

I Corinthians 7:1 “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.”

As a young man, I remember hearing a popular preacher explain the word “touch” in I Corinthians 7:1 as only referring to a sensual touch. The preacher stated men and women were allowed to touch each other freely, but sensual touching was what God was dealing with here in I Corinthians 7:1. Sadly, that preacher was found to be in an illicit relationship with another female some years later. It is so important how you interpret Scripture.

This wicked world has this area of touching upside-down. In marriage, public affectionate touching is frowned upon, but outside of marriage, the world endorses men and women freely hugging and touching. However, this is not what God ordained. In Hebrews 13:4, God states, “Marriage is honourable in all...” Touching in marriage is okay. **It is okay for married couples to kiss each other, hug each other, hold hands, and put arms around each other in public.** Of course, the touching should be discreet, but touching within the bonds of marriage is not bad.

On the other hand, **touching outside the bounds of marriage and family to members of the opposite gender no matter the age should be very limited.** Notice a few things about I Corinthians 7:1. First of all, notice how the verse is not written as an outright command, “Thou shalt not touch.” Probably the reason for this is that God realizes touching between men and women will happen occasionally: a doctor to his patient, the rescuing and helping of someone in an emergency, or even a simple handshake of introduction. So the exhortation is not a command for no touching at all. There are even a number of examples in the Gospels of Jesus briefly touching (same word as I Cor. 7:1) a woman to heal her or a woman touching Jesus to be healed (Mt. 8:15 “And He touched her hand...”, etc...). Keep in mind, though, that God's wise counsel is perfect with no flaws. **If God says it is good for a man not to touch a woman, then don't.**

Secondly, for those who believe the word “touch” here in I Corinthians 7:1 is different from other touches, like the preacher's explanation of sensual touch, you would be wrong. The word “touch” (haptomai) in I Corinthians 7:1 is the same word for any kind of touch used throughout the New Testament. **So, God makes it clear that any kind of touching outside of your immediate family (father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife, children) between men and women is not good and should be limited.** Even the word for “touch” (naga') in our other text, Proverbs 6:29, is defined similarly. The idea of the word is “to lay hold upon (for any purpose...)” (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance).

“But my preacher hugs the women at church.” God Who ordained that preacher

stated, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” “But I’m a senior citizen, so if I hug a younger man or woman that is okay.” **God did not put an age limit to “It is good for a man (any age) not to touch a woman (any age).”**

Make sure you apply this rule (God's rule) to your marriage. It will free your marriage from a lot of needless arguments, regrets, doubts and questions about opposite gender interaction, and possible jealousy. Too many arguments in marriage stem from one spouse questioning the other spouse's interaction with the opposite gender. **Any kind of “touching” of the opposite gender leads you to not being “innocent” (Pro. 6:29) in the eyes of others.** This is not good. What is good is for a man not to touch a woman (I Cor. 7:1). If you limit touching with the opposite gender, one big conflict is eliminated. **Don't get as close to the edge of sin as possible.** Instead get far from the edge and make it obvious that nothing is going on between you and the opposite gender.