

Sex and Character

- 1. How we live our sexual lives is intrinsically a moral matter. Sex both involves and affects others. It can bring new life into the world. It has strong personal and social consequences.*
- 2. Our sexuality is therefore an area of our lives that calls for the presence of virtues—self-control, responsibility, prudence, and the courage to withstand sexual desires.*
- 3. Down through the ages, self-control, including sexual self-control, has been considered a mark of good character. Sexual self-control, historically known as chastity, is an aspect of temperance. Temperance enables us to control our appetites and passions and to avoid abuse even of legitimate pleasures.*
- 4. Notions of sexual restraint, however, were swept away by the sexual revolution. It advanced the idea that people should be free to make love without the strictures of marriage. Commitment was not necessary for sex; love was not necessary. The sexual revolution promised greater happiness, but three decades years later, it's clear that society suffers from a plague of problems stemming from the breakdown of sexual morality.*

The Legacy of the Sexual Revolution

- 1. sexual promiscuity*
- 2. rape—By some estimates, one in four college women reports having been the victim of an attempted date rape.*
- 3. teen pregnancy—one of the highest rates in the developed world.*
- 4. unwed births—up from 5% in 1960 to more than 30% today.*
- 5. more than a million abortions each year. The U. S. has the highest teen abortion rate in the developed world.*
- 6. an explosion of sexually transmitted diseases—currently 15 million new cases each year.*
- 7. emotional and behavioral problems associated with premarital sexual relationships. According to the February 1991 issue of Pediatrics, adolescent sex is increasingly part of a syndrome of troubled behaviors that include drug and alcohol abuse, riding with a drug-using driver, getting suspended from school, running away from home, and suicide (attempted suicide is six times higher among sexually active 12- to 16-year-old girls than among virgins).*

8. *widespread sexual harassment in the schools and workplace—In a 1993 study by the American Association of University Women, 4 f 5 high school students said they have experienced "unwelcome sexual behavior" in school.*
9. *a highly sexualized media*
10. *children, even in the elementary school years, demonstrating precocious sexual talk and behavior*
11. *a growing, increasingly perverted pornography industry*
12. *the sexual abuse of children—an estimated 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys abused at least once before age 18, usually by a trusted adult.*
13. *marital infidelity—Studies over the past decade in the Journal of Marriage and the Family report that persons who are sexually active before marriage are more likely to be unfaithful to their spouse after marriage.*
14. *the damage done to families by many of these problems.*

Surveying this moral landscape, the essayist William Schickel writes: "Chastity, like honesty, is a civic as well as a personal virtue. When a society loses chastity, it begins to destroy itself."