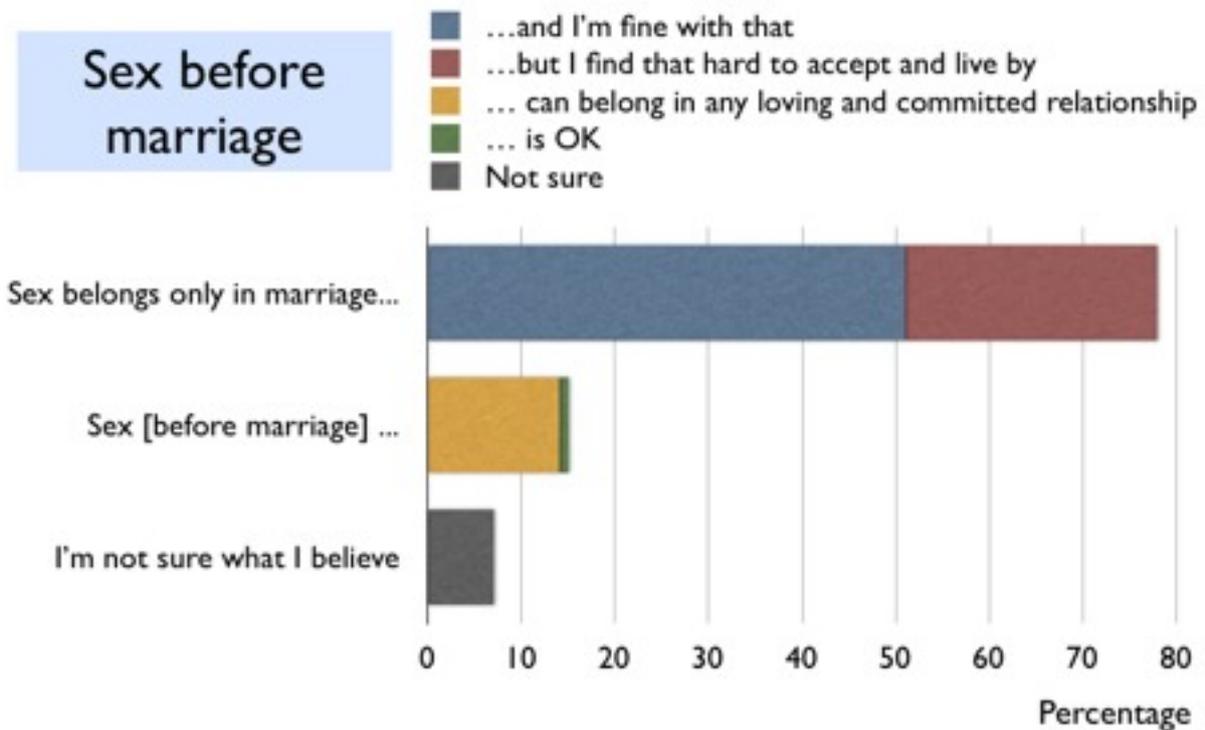


SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE

Summary

Respondents to the survey strongly believe that sex belongs only in marriage, whether or not they find it difficult to live by. Only 15% thought it OK to have sex before marriage and the vast majority of those only in loving and committed relationships.



Within this strong belief, there were two qualifications made in the comments:

- while believing that sex belongs only in marriage, they live by that but find it very hard (17%)
- while believing that sex belongs only in marriage, they would respect others who took a different decision (15%)

Overview

2,514 answered the question **What is your view on sex before marriage?**

51 % Sex belongs only in marriage and I am fine with that

27 % Sex belongs only in marriage but I find that hard to accept and live by

14 % Sex can belong in any loving and committed relationship

1 % It is OK to have sex before marriage

7 % I am not sure what I believe about this

351 responded to the invitation **Any additional comments?** 50 were not included in the analysis as referring to other questions, repeating the answer already given, or whose meaning was not sufficiently clear. The majority were qualifications of the answer given or explanations for it.

Sex means full penetrative sex

The comments generally assumed, as did the question, that what is meant was full penetrative sex. Although a few did treat it as various stages towards this.

- *I assume by "sex" you mean going "all the way"? (97)*
- *'Sex' here mean 'consummated sexual relationship' (157)*
- *The boundaries of what Sex is makes not having sex before marriage a hard concept to define. I am waiting for marriage but have done other things. (238)*
- *I say no penetrative sexual intercourse before marriage as this creates a one flesh union. However I have no difficulty in sexual type of contact that stops short of intercourse as this doesn't create one-flesh union (350)*

For a few this question almost defines being a Christian:

Some comments implied that this is quintessential aspect of being Christian:

- *Difficult to understand how any Christian can answer anything other than the top response here (185)*

Choosing to live by the decision

The biggest response (17%) was people wanting to add something between choice 1 and 2 in the answers above. They say that they believe that sex belongs only in marriage and live by their decision, They find it hard, but not in the sense implied in answer 2 of finding it either hard to

accept or live by in failing to practice that belief. In particular some took issue with 'and I am fine with that', pointing out that restricting sex to marriage is costly and counter-cultural.

- *The options don't enable me to give a clear answer....I don't believe in sex outside of marriage, I find that very hard, but I remain a virgin and committed to God's way (125)*
- *Sex belongs only in marriage, but I'm not sure I am 'fine' with it - celibacy is one of the hardest things for the single Christian because it is one of the most counter cultural choices we make (262)*
- *I'm fine with it but aware I may never marry, which would be disappointing to say the least. (323)*
- *Doesn't make it easy but agree with the principle. I believe a relationship should be built on emotional, physical and spiritual and focus on any one can be unhelpful. (296)*

Living by the decision is only possible with shared conviction

Some (3%) point out that it would be possible only if both parties agreed in faith and had the same conviction. If not then, as the same proportion stated, their relationships always broke up for wishing to maintain waiting until marriage.

- *Accepting and remaining chaste can be challenging, but when both are resolute its easy! (220)*
- *I only believe the above for those with a faith; for those without I would choose 'any loving and committed'; without faith it's not practical or possible to live by such strict rules. (127)*
- *Try getting the man to go along with that... see what I mean about the miracle life has changed so much...so it is a stumbling block...but at least if both Christians maybe one can debate or argue the point on a level playing field so do not fall out! (227)*
- *We have come v close. Our wedding is just under a year away. It's difficult to abstain - we decided not to have sex. But despite crossing some lines (repentance follows), we believe that if we didn't agree with sex before marriage, we might have broken up by now. (106)*
- *Its difficult, as I have dated a couple of non christian who base their relationship on sex, its very difficult to not want it also, as unashamedly, I enjoy sex very much. I just do not want relationships where that is what is the dominant feature. I have dated 3 men in 9 years and that did not last past a couple of dates as, I found I was weak when it cam onto sex and so withdrew from the relationship. This time i am determined to do it my way and hence why I have joined Christian Connections, hopefully finding a friend or relationship based on everything else but sex and especial sharing the same faith.(14)*

Dating that ends because of this

For some, the issue of sex before marriage ends the relationship:

- *My last two relationship broke up because the guys wanted sex before marriage (193)*
- *I have only had relationships with non Christians and as they don't believe the same it has resulted in the break ups (218)*

- *Some ex boyfriends have tried to pressurise me into having sex. this caused arguments and I believe ultimately one of the main reasons previous relationships have ended. (249)*
- *This has been the biggest issue for me, it has stopped several relationships because they will have sex and I won't (287)*

Is there a difference as one gets older?

1 in 20 wondered if the teaching of 'no sex before marriage' was equally applicable both to teenagers and to those older, particularly if children were unlikely, or was realistic for later first marriages in UK society:

- *I believe that a gradual increase in the average age for marriage is creating more and more problems in this area - people are physically 'ready' for marriage for years before actually marrying, and inevitably that leads to struggles with sexual sin, whether single or in a romantic relationship. I do have some struggles in this area, like everyone else, but I have no difficulty accepting it's the truth, because it's in God's word - so I still chose the top answer. (139)*
- *I spent 40 years believing that sex belongs only in marriage but have become less sure of this in the past 5 years. (186)*
- *Some of us have been taught this dogmatically since childhood, but as one gets older and sees the imperfections in the world, you wonder if what we have been taught is the correct way to interpret scripture in today's culture. (214)*
- *It's morally easier to take this view if there is no possibility of conceiving children, but even so the relationship needs to be a committed one (98)*
- *Maybe OK outside marriage when older and no kids involved (116)*

What does 'saving oneself' for marriage mean for divorcees?

Those who had been divorced (5%) and those whom had been converted and had had sexual partners beforehand (3%), said it was especially hard since they were used to expressing love through intimacy. These situations also raised questions about the images being used such as 'saving oneself' 'being a virgin' etc and said that there was no systematic clarity presented about their situation. In these situations, what is the waiting about?

- *I can see the benefits in restricting sex to marriage, but I also think it is piling a lot of pressure onto the wedding night. I also think that for those of us who became Christians later in life, after having had loving monogamous relationships as a non-Christian, it is slightly at odds with 'saving oneself for marriage'. Ultimately, I think it is something for both parties in the couple to agree on. (112)*
- *Strangely, I now think it's best to be celibate until first marriage. Now I would be happy to have sex before any further marriage. (55)*
- *Being divorced I have already experienced a loving sexual relationship within marriage. It is harder therefore to abstain if a new relationship develops. (81)*

- *I think for young single people it is important, but the risk is that they may just get married to have sex! I do feel it is a slightly different issue for divorcees (250)*

The decision only applies to those professing a Christian faith

Despite choosing to accept that they (say they) would't have sex before marriage, 15% accepted that others might make a different decision and that would be OK for them and 2 % specifically said that it would not apply to those not professing a Christian faith.

- *This is the ideal and standard I believe set by God and I think this holds for Christians, but there are people who have different values and sleep together before marriage and then go onto have happy, faithful and loving marriages. I respect them, I do not judge them. (58)*

Staying a virgin all one's life?

Some appeared to express their disappointment that they were still virgins (at 30, 40), implying that God had made them sexual beings without fulfillment. Two countered it by saying there were virtues in chastity and 'what you've never known, you've never missed' (215).

- *Still waiting sadly (51)*
- *I have never been in the position where sex was a realistic possibility, so I cannot swear that in a loving relationship I wouldn't be tested and tempted. I am also uncertain whether my stance against pre-marital sex is a revisionist explanation of why I am a virgin at almost 30. (273)*
- *I really don't know anymore! I am 35 and haven't had sex but am wondering what I would do now in a committed relationship. I definitely think it is supposed to be in the context of a loving committed relationship. But I also find it hard to believe that as sexual beings it would be gods plan that I'm still a virgin if I'm single at 65.... (187)*
- *I am a virgin, but would love to have been able to have sex. (197)*

Regrets and consequences for sex and no sex before marriage

Those stating that sex belongs only in marriage and they are fine with it included those giving the Bible as authority and 7% saying that they had had sex before marriage and regretted it. Some looked at their beliefs about the consequences: soul ties between the two people, taking on their spirits through sex, given Satan authority over their life, or risk of pregnancy. One considered that waiting turned their marriage towards a companionate one.

- *Having said that I have had sex before marriage and regret it due to the emotional problems it caused (264)*
- *Whilst I believe in my heart that sex is for marriage I have caved in but now really struggle with sexual temptation and am reminded frequently of Song of Solomon 2:7 "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (164)*
- *I waited in my first marriage and I think issues with waiting for years before then marrying (we were still only 24 when we married and 29 when we divorced) had a negative impact. I think it*

can be detrimental to wait too long as the relationship can then become more like a friendship only. The solution that many Christians take of marrying within five minutes is not something I would do to overcome this as once married it should be for life! (64)

Sex is OK in a loving relationship

Many (8%) repeated their view that sex can belong in any loving and committed relationship (Choice 3), with only a few qualifications, such as 'on the way to marriage' or 'engaged' or provided there is 'communication and trust'.

It's important to test compatibility

Based on experience, 1 in 50 espoused the view that it was important to test compatibility:

- *Having been married and was a virgin, and we struggled with sex for 7 years. It caused the breakdown of my marriage. (167)*
- *Before my marriage broke down I would say sex only in marriage, but the breakdown was partly due to my husband and I not being compatible emotionally and sexually (5)*
- *Experience with ex-wife means I would want to know we were compatible (278)*
- *I waited when I got married before and have always regretted that. I would need to experience that with someone before I committed to marrying them. (210)*
- *Was a virgin when married to my husband but he was sexually abusive from early days of our marriage and therefore as such my views have changed and I don't think I would wait for marriage to have sex as long as the relationship was a committed one. Saying this I haven't had sex with anyone other than my husband and that relationship ended nearly 10 years ago. (307)*
- *I have had 2 friends who waited to have sex until after marriage. One was gay and couldn't perform, the other had a child size penis. They both said they knew only a Christian girl could be tricked into no sex before marriage. That made me change my view. (311)*

The Church and sex

A few mentioned the need for church teaching, but more were concerned about the UK Church's fixation about sex, leading to a more judgmental attitude towards it rather than other sins.

- *The Bible is clear we should only have sex with one person, however there are many other sins that we all commit on an almost daily basis, so why the fixation with this sin? (130)*
- *I think avoiding sex is a practical consideration to protect feelings - when we have sex we get more involved, so avoiding sex would help us to avoid heartache .. but the sex drive is very powerful. I think the Church in the West is hung up on sex. In the Caribbean they worry more about covetousness - which doesn't bother us. (175)*
- *One may have ideals but turning them into rules can cause problems. and even NT marriages were not as legalistic and sex did take place after the couple were engaged.*

Originally a man took a woman into his tent and that meant he would be marrying her (Ruth and Boaz). Just because men and women can get away with not honouring this concept does not mean it invalidates it for everyone else. Putting the whole focus of being a Christian on sex is unhealthy as the focus is on helping others and doing our bit in life, not staying in with crossed legs, scared of being taken advantage of. (82)

- *I believe sex only within marriage is an ideal to which to aspire (and to which hitherto I have adhered) but I really don't think pre-marital sex is sinful and I am sure that many Christians have engaged in it. (260)*
- *I have fallen short many times, to my shame - and would be great if I felt that I could talk to church leaders about this, but I really can't see this happening - they're well meaning, but judgemental (107)*
- *Making love starts with holding hands whereas sex starts nearly at the end. Have we complicated things unnecessarily? Is this thing about no sex (disregarded by most anyway) just taking our eyes of Jesus and onto rules and regulations? However, because I have been told in the past that it is sinful, I would have difficulty in going along with what I have just said and maybe that is why I am still single? I immediately presume someone wants to take advantage of me. But loving God, our neighbour and ourself are far more important things. Also to do what we can for others against injustice and oppression, so if along the way there is love but not marriage, how can I really believe I am more sinful than if I stay at home with crossed legs fleeing any close friendships? Trying to be perfect will never work and admitting we cannot but will do our best is surely better? (271)*
- *I think we've been set up to fail (77)*
- *Sick of patronising books on the subject. We live in a sexualised culture. I am celibate. It is killing me. Partly cos no one will talk to me about how hard it is. The church teaches really rubbish stuff about the genders and sex. As a woman I should be sweet and angelic and pure. I am not. I don't want to be. I want to be safe. I don't want to deny I am a sexual being. I don't want to be afraid of being sexual person I also want to deal with that in a healthy manner and a godly manner. (319)*

What is meant by marriage?

Some wanted to question the definition of marriage used in the question : *I'm questioning this as well as what is marriage (91)*. Would sex before marriage be 'adultery' or 'fornication'? What did Paul mean if you can't control yourself, just get married. What was 'marriage' in those days? There were several longer comments discussing the difference between 'being married' and the bit of paper in the national administration that said you were legally so. There was, however, consistency that there should:

a) be an agreement in place - either for long-term commitment, licence under national legal administration, and/ or appropriate financial arrangements, and

b) that the marriage comes into being at the point of having sex ('consummating the marriage').

- *Sex was permitted once couples were engaged and the relevant financial agreements signed. In OT days, a man allowing a woman to sleep in his tent meant he would marry her. This was part of the culture and so men who wished to be respected just could not and did not go around seducing woman (271)*

- *Sex before marriage is described as fornication by the church, but I am not convinced fornication actually means that. I think there is more to this and would need a great deal of study. However, following the Biblical principles, there should be an agreement to marriage e.g. marriage licence, before the actual marriage takes place between the husband and wife. (190)*
- *I find the "magic" of a marital status change after a ceremony a strange concept, but I do believe that sex should only be between people who have made a life-long commitment to each other (255)*
- *Marriage was originally defined by its consummation, not by the ceremony! (170)*