The Christian and Petting

Kelsey E. Hinshaw

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THE
CHRISTIAN
AND
PETTING

by KELSEY E HINSHAW
PREFACE

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Need for the teaching contained in this booklet is evident. As a nation we are going the way of Rome, and are much farther down that road than we were ten years ago. Few people seem to realize just how seriously our very existence as a nation is being threatened by our national immorality. Denominations and churches are seeing a numerical growth, but as a force for righteousness they are losing ground. They are too much tied in with the ways of the world, and the individuals who stand out as men and women of God are far too few.

I wish to express appreciation to my own family and to the following for their encouragement and helpful suggestions:

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First Friends Church, Portland, Oreg.

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Kenneth M. Williams, Dean,
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It is largely because of the expression of appreciation and the encouragement on the part of these that this article has been saved and is now being published.

Kelsey E Hinshaw
800 East Street
Newberg, Oregon
This article is called forth by the following considerations: There is the desire, first, to answer the stock remark of so many young people, "What's the harm? Everybody does it." — and second, to arouse the church of today to a realization of what is happening.

Our homes and home influences are at an all-time low. Divorce, the "white slave" trade, and the illegitimate birth rate are, according to government statistics, at or near all-time highs. Competent authorities conservatively report that in one U. S. city alone hundreds of girls disappear each day of the year never to be heard from again. We see about us indications of a sadistic social trend like that which preceded the crack-up of the Roman Empire. One such indication is the tremendous drawing power of the prize fight and the modern slap-bang professional wrestling match. It may be hard for the psychologist to find the answer to these conditions, but for the Christian it is found in Romans 1:28, "And even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind..."

What does all this have to do with petting? There is a close correlation. Psychologists tell us that sadism is a form of sex perversion characterized by a sense of satisfaction in the infliction of pain. It would take volumes to present available evidence showing that where the breakdown of family life occurs and sadistic tendencies are to be found, low moral standards
relating to sex are also found or soon follow and vice versa.

It is not surprising that a society giving the emphasis to sex that we do finds itself being destroyed by that very thing. The sad part is that so many professing Christians accept this worldly pattern. We are so much under the influence of the behavioristic school of psychology that we, even in the church, have a tendency to feel that what everybody does is normal and therefore should be condoned. We profess to acknowledge God, but so often fail to acknowledge and follow the moral standards He has given us.

Let us define petting so our meaning may be clear as we use the term. Any relationship involving physical contact between individuals that arouses, or is intended to arouse, sex passion in either individual may reasonably be called petting. Other than physical contact might well be included, but to limit our field we shall confine our discussion to the definition given and its application to courtship. To keep our definition clear we shall later in the article consider those actions which might reasonably be expected to arouse passion, but seemingly do not, as "fringe petting."

We face a complex problem. Kissing, hugging, holding hands — each may be petting and again may not be. Those relationships more likely to be classified as "heavy petting" will almost invariably be petting under our restricted definition. God created us man and woman for the recognized and stated purpose of perpetuating the race. The fact that this is God's choice indicates there is nothing unclean or shameful about sex. To consider it so is to question God's judgment. True, sex may be used in a shameful and evil way, but inherently it remains clean, pure and holy. The idea that sex should be discussed only in hush-hush tones and only when absolutely necessary certainly does not come from the Bible.

We are dealing with one of the strongest of human emotions. This great dynamic urge of the physical man is so strong that there has always been the problem of how to control, direct and keep it in its proper place. Experience indicates the sex drive needs no special stimulation, such as that given by petting, to bring people to marriage. This leads to our first conclusion:

PETTING IS NOT NECESSARY FOR THE CARRYING OUT OF GOD'S PURPOSE IN OUR LIVES.

Some things although not necessary may be helpful. How does petting stand in this respect? It would be very hard to make a case for it even on this basis. Who would go so far as to say that petting is an asset to man's moral or spiritual development? To the best of our knowledge no such argument has ever been presented. Although there are psychologists today who argue that man's desire should not be repressed, they would be among the first to say that it is harmful to arouse the sex drive and then fail to satisfy it. The word of many reputable psycholo-
gists and physiologists could be brought to show that petting not only fails to be helpful but may be a detriment to physical well-being and in many cases proves an obstacle to marital happiness and success. This indicates our second conclusion:

**PETTING DOES NOT HELP US TO CARRY OUT GOD'S PURPOSE IN OUR LIVES.**

Christians should hesitate to do that which is neither necessary nor helpful but is often actually harmful physically and psychologically as well as morally. Nevertheless evidence indicates that millions of young people practice petting even though they are professing to be Christian and would accept the conclusions thus far reached. Since this is true we must establish further conclusions.

Christians should avoid evil and the very appearance of evil (I Thes. 5:21-22), also that which is the occasion of stumbling in others (Rom. 14:21). When we condemn the social dance, people of the world often answer, "I'd rather have a daughter of mine dancing than out in some car petting." Without question petting is the greater evil. To say the least, many people of the world recognize petting as evil. It has been a factor in the fall of literally millions of young people. It plays a major role in the tremendously high illegitimate birth rate today. How can Christians feel God's approval on such a questionable pastime? If they do seem to, they undoubtedly mistake their own desire for God's approval. The leadership of the Spirit and God's approval are always in line with God's Word. While the word petting is not used, the Bible very definitely deals with this subject.

Jesus quoted—"Thou shalt not commit adultery"—and went on to say that anyone who looked upon a woman with lust in his heart had already committed adultery with her. Some may wonder about the distinction between adultery and fornication. Both terms are often used in the Bible in a figurative sense. In fact, this is the only way fornication is used in the Old Testament. However, the same Hebrew word is used in reference to harlotry. In its physical sense, adultery was considered by those to whom Jesus spoke to apply to sexual un faithfulness to a husband or a wife while fornication applied to sexual relations on the part of those not married and also to harlotry.

This same general distinction seems to have been held in Old Testament times, although adultery in particular seems to have had a broader meaning and none of the lines of distinction were drawn as closely. It might be noted that it was common to apply adultery to the unfaithful wife and seldom to the unfaithful husband. Jesus points out that their present usage of the word adultery does not give full meaning to the commandment in question—Thou shalt not commit adultery. He indicates three things in the commandment that they were likely to overlook—first, it applies equally to men as
well as to women; second, it applies not only to the physical act itself but also to the heart condition or thoughts and feelings that relate to such an act; and third, it applies not only to the married but to the unmarried as well. This is indicated by the Greek word “all” as used by Jesus.

The teaching of Jesus should have a great deal of weight in determining that which we may and may not do. This is our basis for applying this commandment to the subject at hand.

The Greek word Jesus used that has been translated “to lust after” is “epithumeo”. This in turn is derived from two Greek words “epi”, a preposition indicating superimposition, and “thumos” meaning passion. “Thumos” in turn is derived from “thuo” meaning “to rush, breathe hard”. In other words, Jesus is talking of a condition characterized by a quickened pulse and increased breathing — a deep emotion designated as lust or passion and directed upon a woman. Since He went on and tied this lust up with adultery, there can be no reasonable doubt but that He was talking of the same sex passion that we in our definition indicated petting leads to. Jesus speaking of the law said, “I am not come to destroy but to fulfill.” In this case the condemnation of adultery stands and adultery is enlarged to include sex passion occasioned merely by the sight of a woman.

What reasonable individual could say that Jesus would include in His definition of adultery a passion occasioned by looking at a woman and not include the same passion when occasioned by physical contact with the same woman? Jesus does not indicate that looking at a woman always, or even usually, results in adultery, nor are we suggesting that physical contact automatically means sex stimulation, but according to Jesus, where stimulation does result, it is adultery.

Since petting, according to our definition, is made up of those actions which lead to sexual stimulation, and Jesus designated this as adultery, we cannot avoid the conclusion that Jesus condemns petting because of what it is. To avoid this conclusion it would be necessary to disregard the teaching of Jesus or do violence to the meaning of the words He used as interpreted by the best of Greek scholarship. Our knowledge of the “betrothal” customs as held by Judaism and practiced by the people of Christ’s time is an added indication that His teaching concerning adultery was meant to apply except within the actual marriage relationship itself. May we suggest that ministers and others who deal with those of the opposite sex must observe a “hands off” policy if the cause of Christ “be not reproached.” Since petting does have the appearance of evil in the eyes of many and it has been and continues to be a stumbling block for count-
less numbers and since Jesus specifically contends it, we as Christians must accept this our third conclusion:

PETTING IS CONDEMNED IN THE BIBLE AND CAN HAVE NO PLACE IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN.

It should not be necessary to present further arguments and evidence but because of the seriousness and prevalence of the condition under consideration we shall continue. The only basis now left upon which a Christian could possibly justify petting would be the claim that the conduct in question does not fall within the definition given. Let us now examine this phase of the question. To do this, let us make two divisions which may be designated as (1) "fringe petting" and (2) a genuine expression of love.

May we define "fringe petting" as those actions which approach petting or which might seem to be petting and yet appear to fall outside our definition as arousing sex passion. In taking up this first division, let us ask the question—what is the purpose of kissing, hugging, etc.? It cannot be to arouse any passion for that is "out" for the Christian. We cannot use "getting a kick" as an argument for that can scarcely be anything but the very thing we must avoid. The chance it might be something else is so small that the Christian who would indulge in this "fringe petting" must be able to present some definite value to be derived to justify his action and justify by-passing I Thes. 5:21-22 and Rom. 14:21. What then can be a reason or excuse for indulging in this popular questionable pastime? Can any basis be presented except that it is a pleasure and enjoyable? To our knowledge no other has ever been presented. That the conduct in question may bring a sense of pleasure and enjoyment will not be denied but again the question comes—why?

Here are some of the reasons why this "fringe petting" would be questionable even if without any of the evils we have been discussing:

(1) Petting or "fringe petting" is dangerous because it is a flimsy foundation upon which to build a happy and successful home and it hinders setting up that which may be a real foundation. Some girls may be able to enjoy being fondled and caressed and not go beyond just a sense of pleasure but any normal man who will be honest with himself knows his emotions do not stop there. But suppose the emotions of both could be limited to pleasure, it still might prove harmful in various ways. For instance, if a couple depends upon petting of any kind to entertain themselves, they are almost surely neglecting to build a basis of true companionship and friendship that will stand the test of time. Sex plays an important part in successful marriage, but the marriage that depends upon sex for its success is doomed to almost certain failure.

(2) "Fringe petting," as we have defined it, is dangerous because no one knows when the
border may be crossed and it actually becomes petting. This is something girls especially should realize. From the standpoint of sex, men and women were created with very different reaction characteristics. The normal male of the species is always in a state of readiness and it may require little response or indication of readiness on the part of the female to thoroughly arouse his passion. On the other hand, the normal female may require considerable preliminary love-play before she reaches a comparable state of passion. When aroused, however, it is usually much harder for her to control these feelings than it is for him. There are, of course, exceptions to these rules, and these reaction characteristics may be materially altered by various thought and reaction patterns previously established. This last is one reason petting may place an obstacle in one's road to marital happiness.

In view of his nature by creation and God's standard for his living a man must live with brakes in shape and be ready to apply them at a moment's notice. This presents little or no problem to the Christian if he follows God's plan and has formed the habit of applying the brakes at the top of the hill. Then if he inadvertently finds himself on a down-grade of passion, he can apply the brakes with little danger but that they will hold and he will have himself well under control. One may not always be responsible for thoughts and feelings that enter his mind, but he is responsible if they stop and dwell there.

In contrast with man, woman by nature of creation, if she had only herself to consider, could do a lot of coasting with little thought of any need for special effort to control her feelings. In other words, when man starts down the hill of aroused passion, he continually gains momentum as he goes. Woman, on the other hand, coasts more or less gently along and can stop almost any time with little effort or damage until a certain point is reached. After this point the scene abruptly changes. No longer is the slope gentle. It becomes very steep — so steep, in fact, that it is often beyond her power to hold herself in check no matter how much she may have wished to keep passion under control. If there is any stopping now it will be the man who stops or it will at least be with his help. This means that if a woman has placed herself in the hands of a man who has no desire to stop, especially if he knows what he is about, and she allows herself to be taken beyond this point there is almost no chance there will be any stopping. One of the worst things about this is the fact that very few if any women, especially among the uninitiated, know how or when this point is reached or passed. Add to this the fact that so few men recognize a need for control on their part and we have the very logical explanation for our tragically high rate of conceptions outside of marriage.

Although normally for herself woman has little need for control, actually she has as great if not greater need than has man, and to be effective it must be exerted early in the game. In the first place, since man's reaction may depend
so largely upon her, she must control the situa-
tion on his account, especially since in our time
man has been more and more educated to be-
lieve his desire should be gratified. In the sec-
ond place, this same education has so altered the
pattern it would seem God considers normal that
often woman needs protection against her own
emotion. Because only a questionable pleasure
is all that can be offered in its favor and because
it is not only dangerous but fails to satisfactorily
pass such Bible passages as I Thes. 5:21-22 and
Rom. 14:21, we come to this, our fourth con-
clusion:

EVEN WHAT WE MAY CALL "FRINGE
PETTING" CANNOT BE JUSTIFIED IN CHRIS-
TIAN CONDUCT.

Let us now take up the remaining division of
our subject — kissing, etc., as a sincere expres-
sion of genuine and legitimate love. Such ex-
pressions properly used have our highest ap-
proval. The thing we need to consider here is —
if such is used in courtship is there love-play
present? Consideration given any custom or ac-
tion must depend somewhat upon its place and
use in the society we are considering. In some
tribes or societies kissing is never used in love-
play. In such cases this discussion might have
little application except for the fact that kissing
does involve certain secondary sexual nerve cen-
ters. In our society, however, kissing custo-
marily plays a large part in almost all love-play.
Since this is generally recognized and accepted,
"know" will realize that too often the goodnight kiss is love-play and nothing else. The kiss of itself may be entirely harmless, but when pressure is added and duration is extended and especially if the pressure of one body against another adds its stimulation of various other secondary sexual nerve centers, the kiss certainly becomes something else.

Since it seems there should seldom if ever be an actual need for an exchange of physical expressions of genuine love between those who are not engaged, there can scarcely be a need for so much as a casual goodnight kiss. In speaking of genuine love here, we are not using love in the social or moral sense Jesus so often used the Greek word "agapao" in the New Testament. We do include this in our meaning but add to it the element of personal sex attraction toward, satisfaction with, appreciation of, and the desire to please, protect and serve one desired as a mate. Even though there may be genuine love present on the part of one or both, it is doubtful if a Biblical basis could be found for its expression and acceptance by means of kissing, etc., before betrothal.

The engagement period begins not with the public announcement or giving of a ring but with the mutual pledging and acceptance of the two involved. Needless to say this step should be taken only after careful and prayerful consideration and with the realization it is for life. The breaking of an engagement is looked upon altogether too lightly by Christians today. If it seems one should be broken, the chances are very great that the engagement was never justified in the first place. Many engagements are made today on the basis of infatuation and sex stimulation resulting from petting. In some of these infatuations it may develop into love, but there is no wonder so many "blow up" or, if the marriage takes place, so many of them fail. With petting present there is not nor can there be a basis upon which one may judge if he is really in love.

Out of the foregoing considerations we come to our fifth conclusion:

IN COURTSHIP BEFORE ENGAGEMENT WE SEE NO LEGITIMATE OCCASION FOR AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE BY ANY OF THE PHYSICAL MEANS WE HAVE BEEN DISCUSING. EVEN AFTER ENGAGEMENT SUCH EXPRESSIONS MUST BE KEPT FREE FROM LOVE-PLAY.

Let us keep in mind the fact that we are approaching this problem from the Christian viewpoint. Many arguments presented apply equally well to the Christian or the non-Christian. Let us remember, however, that there is a sharp line of demarcation that sets the conduct of the Christian apart. We often hear the words — everybody does it. This argument can never be valid for the Christian. In fact it is worse than no argument because it acts as a narcotic to
ease one's conscience. While the foregoing words can never be a valid argument, they are all too true as a statement of fact. Social workers and many others are aware of this. It remained, however, for the widely accepted Kinsey Report to place these facts before us in bold relief.

It may be a good thing to have these statistics, but as Christians we need to be aware of the potentiality of such reports. They purport to be the bare statement of statistical facts, but in this report, which is the first of 20 proposed to be published within a 28-year period, we can detect the tendency to argue that since this is what most people do, it is therefore natural and normal and should be accepted as a matter of course. Increasingly more people are arguing this way, but again we repeat, it can never be valid for the Christian.

A great deal of the responsibility for present low sex standards and practices can be placed on the Freudian teaching of psychology and on behaviorism which has its roots very largely in the teaching of Freud. A leading Christian psychiatrist puts it thus: "How is it possible to reconcile the popular teaching based upon Freud with the Christian standard of morals? 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' (Ex. 20:14) 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.' (Matt. 5:28) It is obvious that no reconciliation is possible."* (Bold face emphasis is mine.)

Is it not evident that Christians must avoid petting and all appearance of the evils thereof? We hear some say, "But I know Christian young people who pet", or, "I'm a Christian and don't feel condemnation for what petting I've done."

Some may have, to a greater or lesser extent, entered into this sort of thing without realizing the evil involved. The pressure of example and social acceptance, along with the suggestive influence of so much that is found in radio, television, movies, reading materials, etc., plus an awakened physical drive, all combine to influence conscience as well as action.

We might point out that our conscience checks us only with regard to those things we believe to be wrong or that down deep in our hearts we feel we should recognize as evil. God has not indicated the conscience as a standard of measurement to determine that which is good or evil, but rather it is His word to which we must look. We also need to keep in mind the fact that

according to the Bible we are living in an age of deception that extends even into the church. We are promised that we may know if we are really Christians, but many who think they know actually do not because they have not met the conditions and standards God presents whereby they may have that knowledge.

God says of His people that they are destroyed for lack of knowledge, and that because they have rejected knowledge He will reject them. (Hosea 4:6). The excuse that many act in ignorance or on the basis of an improperly trained conscience will not save us from the judgment that always comes upon nations that have become deeply involved in the sins of idolatry and adultery.

We are witnessing the same kind of moral disintegration that history indicates preceded the breakdown of various civilizations and cultures. Surely Christians should not contribute to this breakdown whether it means the end of our civilization or not. Surely we must avoid that which without question is contributing to the destruction of many souls for whom Christ died. Petting by professed Christians indicates a breakdown of Christian morality. When we consider why so many young people have to keep returning to the altar again and again, petting and its accompanying evils can be written in capital letters at the head of the list.

Although fornication and adultery, even as understood before the teaching of Christ, are too frequently found today even among young people and in church circles, many, even though they themselves pet, look with something of horror upon those who “go the limit.” To be sure those who do “go the limit” have greater guilt in the sight of the law and social acceptance and must expect to reap accordingly, but IN THE SIGHT OF GOD THOSE WHO PRACTICE PETTING STAND EQUALLY CONDEMNED BY THE SIDE OF THOSE WHO GO ON TO THE NATURAL AND NORMAL CULMINATION OF THAT WHICH PETTING ALWAYS BEGINS. We have no fear that anyone can present a sound Biblical basis indicating otherwise.

We bring no individual condemnation. We leave that entirely to God. Our part is to picture conditions. If we were to place responsibility for these conditions, much more of it would have to go on the shoulders of those of us who are older — parents, teachers, ministers — than on the young people themselves. There is, however, a responsibility young peo-
people cannot avoid. No Christian can just shrug this off. The evidence must be carefully and prayerfully considered. Refusal to consider "light" that has been presented is to undermine the Christian's relationship with God.

One who honestly desires to live a Christian life seeks to know and do the will of His Lord and Master. Jesus in effect said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) He called attention to the commandment — you shall not commit adultery — and clearly enlarged this to include petting.

The solution of this and many another problem is embodied in the great commission Jesus gave to the church and its individual members (Matt. 28:19-20). Too often we have failed to realize that the teaching of moral standards is included as definitely as is evangelism and that "at home" is part of the world. In view of evidence all about us, some of which we have been considering in this article, it would seem we have tragically failed in teaching some of those things Jesus commanded. Jesus gave many instructions regarding our moral standards and our relations with our fellowmen. The world, or even the church at large, may pay little attention to our teaching, but that does not relieve us of the responsibility for doing that teaching nor does it relieve Christians of the responsibility for living accordingly.

In view of all this, is it not important that all who profess the name of Christ should avoid petting and the very appearance of such evils? Let us acknowledge God in all things lest He give us up "to a base mind and improper conduct."