

A Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality
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The Binary Nature of Creation

From the beginning of creation God created the human race as male and female to be binary in nature (Gen. 1:26-27). As a wise Father, God set up principles and boundaries for his creation. One of those foundational principles was that the higher order species of plants and animals would procreate by means of this binary sexuality. Continuation of each species required God's creation to be male and female with each having specific physical characteristics, body structures, and complimentary natures to procreate. The male and female genders are designed to for a specific creational purpose, and men and women are physically and psychologically equipped to be fulfilled and content in these purposes. Children are always born with this binary sexuality in the likeness of their parents.

God's first man and woman were commanded to "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). Human procreation and fruitfulness can only exist through the gift of human sexuality. God created man in his own image and likeness: "male and female he created them" (Gen 1: 27), entrusting to them the task of "having dominion over the earth" (Gen 1:28).¹

The example of Adam and Eve gives us a picture of the human sexuality that God intended for the human race—one couple united to each other for the purposes of companionship, procreation, and together worshipping God. He established a human bonding between husbands and wives that would reflect the mystery and joy of His own nature—the communion of the Blessed Trinity. This union of the masculine and feminine can be seen as the wraparound concept for the entire Bible, within which the other themes find their places.² Companionship between male and female also provides the context in which a newborn child can receive the security needed for growth and development in a balanced way, while being taught to have a relationship with God the Father.

Human sexuality involves all of the physical, emotional, and social feelings and behaviors that inform one's sense of being male or female. The characteristics of being a man or a woman involve biological, psychological, and sociological factors as well as the reproductive capacity and sexual functions of genital organs.³ Being male or female was designed to be an integral part of life from birth until death. In fact it is from this binary sexual nature that a person receives both the physical and psychological attributes that make someone a man or a woman.⁴ These physical and psychological aspects of sexuality include bonds expressed through manifestations of love, trust, and care in the union of a man and woman as husband and wife. This is one of the most basic and also most profound aspects of being created in the image of God. God intended

¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. (1987). *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation (Donum vitae)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

² Ortlund, R. (2016). *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*. (D. C. Ortlund & M. Van Pelt, Eds.) p. 16. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

³ *Sexuality*. (2015). In Compton's Encyclopedia. Chicago, IL: Compton's Encyclopedia.

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. (1975). *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics (Persona humana)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

that a man and a woman should have a spiritual connection with each other and with God as they form a permanent relationship that involves the body, soul, and spirit.⁵

Manhood is not an abstract concept, but rather is a life-style to be embodied by men. Likewise, there is a God-made reality, called womanhood, to be lived out by women. A man can only function at his best when he embraces his masculinity. A woman can only function at her best when she embraces her femininity. A family can only function at its best when the masculinity of the father and the femininity of the mother work cooperatively together. Men and women are born to serve different roles and to express their identity and life purpose in different ways. When men and women fulfill their God-created union, they have the joyful duty of being “naked and not ashamed” as they become one-flesh. (Gen 2:24).

Male and female were created for different tasks and are equipped physically, psychologically, and spiritually to fulfill those tasks for which they were created. In the sight of God and with respect to eternal salvation, there is no difference at all between men and women, who are equally loved by God and chosen by him for eternity.⁶ However, there are important physical and psychological differences between males and females that are fundamental to the nature of the human race and to its survival.⁷

Binary sexuality provides the ground for the survival and growth of humanity populating the earth.⁸ But the profound beauty and mutual enjoyment of sexual intercourse leads to a desire for one’s spouse that is intended to bind husband and wife together physically and emotionally (psychologically or soulishly). This special communion and unity of two persons through sexual intimacy produces a resultant bond that should last a lifetime. It outlasts the childbearing years and can provide the couple with comfort and security into old age.⁹ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh (Gen 2:24).

The Intrinsic Goodness of Creation

A major Biblical characteristic of creation is its intrinsic goodness. In the creation story we find emphasis placed on the fact that God regarded his creation as “good” (Gen 1:3-4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and the creation of humanity was very good (1:31).¹⁰ The word good is repeated six times, indicating that God has successfully made what he intended to make. “Creation it is therefore perfect, not in some abstract way but in the sense that every created thing is fully formed and equipped for the task(s) assigned to it.”¹¹

⁵ Failure to accept or believe in this spiritual connection has contributed to the sexual brokenness and sexual sin in modern society according to Peter R. Jones *The God Of Sex* (2006), Colorado Springs, Ligonier Press

⁶ Gal 3:28

⁷ Bray, G. (2012). *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (p. 312). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

⁸ See Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger, *God’s Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 31. The authors helpfully note that “God delegated to humanity as male and female the power to rule and to procreate. He put humans on the earth to take care of it for him, requiring them to reproduce as male and female.”

⁹Op. cit, Bray, G. p. 312

¹⁰ Bird, M. F. (2013). *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (p. 157). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ Op. cit, Bray, G p. 230

With Adam and Eve, the capstone of creation has been put in place.¹² The statement in chapter one of Genesis that human creation was very good provides three foundational truths.

1. God is not repulsed by human bodies or sexuality. He is the creator of a material world, and it is very good. He created sexuality to be a beautiful and pleasurable joining together of a man and woman in covenant with God and with each other. Human minds are often blinded and in error, not understanding the plan of God.¹³
2. Biblical creation utterly denies any kind of worldview that gives people a right to change what God has made.
3. Since his work was complete and good, there is no need for him to change or correct anything. (Gen 2:1-3). It is not mankind's place to change what God has deemed to be perfect at creation. Though creation has experienced brokenness, God's intention has not changed in regard to sexuality.

The goodness of creation is ultimately part of God's own goodness that is communicated to his creatures. As the Roman Catholic Catechism says: "Because creation comes forth from God's goodness, it shares in that goodness—And God saw that it was good ... very good—for God willed creation as a gift addressed to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him."¹⁴ Genesis clearly reveals that God chooses whether one is born male or female.¹⁵ It is not a personal choice. Some of the Church Fathers commented on this principle. Referring to the bodily forms and structures of being male and female, St. Gregory of Nyssa said that "each of these elements is certainly to be found in all that partakes of human life."¹⁶ St. Ephrem the Syrian understood the sovereignty of God and the goodness of creation when he wrote: "If everything that was suitable for Eve, who came to be from the rib, was complete in and from that rib, it is rightly said that "male and female he created them."¹⁷ For Ephrem, the male and female principle was intrinsically part of God's divine plan of creation.

The Relationship Between Male and Female

Sexual relationships can be complicated and complex. It is crucial for Christians to cultivate a positive theological perspective of human sexuality and biblical foundations for sexual morality. That is why Christians need a theology of the body that is anchored in the Bible's unfolding drama of redemption.

Roman Catholic Pope John Paul II wrote extensively on the theology of the body. Part two of his *Familiaris Consortio* discusses themes and ideas such as the dignity of human persons who are bodily and sexual beings called to love and to give themselves to others in love.¹⁸ Pope John Paul emphasizes that human persons, who have an innate vocation to love as God loves, are bodily beings. *Familiaris Consortio* says that sexuality, "by means of which man and woman give

¹² See Psalm 8

¹³ Second Corinthians 4:4 (NKJV): *whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 70–71.

¹⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. (2003). *Considerations Regarding Proposals to give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa: *On the Making of Man*. In P. Schaff & H. Wace (Eds.), H. A. Wilson (Trans.), (1893), *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.*, (Vol. 5, p. 406), New York: Christian Literature Company.

¹⁷ Louth, A., & Conti, M. (Eds.). (2001). *Genesis 1–11* (p. 36). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press

¹⁸ May, W. E. (2010). *Theology of the body in context: genesis and growth* (p. 46). Boston, MA: Pauline Books.

themselves to one another through the acts that are proper and exclusive to spouses concerns the innermost being of the human person.”¹⁹

Pope John Paul II insists that sexuality is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. This self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present.²⁰ This totality of giving also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility. This fertility is directed to the generation of a human being, and so by its nature “it surpasses the purely biological order and involves a whole series of personal values.”²¹

The union of husbands and wives has been elevated by Christ to be the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. This deepens our understanding of the theology of the body. Pope John Paul II wrote that as baptized Christians, spouses are

“definitively placed within the spousal covenant of Christ with the Church, sanctioned in the blood of Christ. The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart, and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordered, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave himself on the Cross.”²²

As God’s covenant bound Israel to Himself, the binding of two people together is reflected in God’s purpose for a husband and wife. The Christian understanding of the church as the Bride of Christ both reflects Christ’s relationship with the church and confirms the parallel union between husbands and wives.²³ The foundation of covenant inspired love and union between a man and a woman is a reflection of their relationship with God.

Attraction to the opposite sex often arises because one sees a physically desirable characteristic in another person, but physical beauty can be deceptive and often fades away, so romance—sense of beauty itself—must run much deeper than physical attraction. A positive scriptural understanding of sexuality must go beyond both physical attraction and physical union. Human sexuality was intended to be more than a physical act being used for genital pleasure. There is another dimension to human sexuality, namely, the social or affective dimension.²⁴ Relationships of real intimacy that include emotional warmth, compassion, and tenderness are much more fundamental and powerful than relationships based upon only genital expression.

¹⁹ John Paul II. (1981). *Familiaris Consorti 11:1-3*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

²⁰ Op. cit. May pp. 46–47

²¹ Ibid. p. 47

²² Ibid. p. 4 this quote refers to Pope John Paul’s “*Theology of the Body*” sections 13.3; cf. 13.6, 9; and 16.1, 5–6.

²³ This can be seen in Mt 19:3–12 and Mk 10:6–9. Chapter five of Ephesians makes it clear that Christ’s love for the church is the pattern for a husband’s love for his wife. Likewise, the church’s glad submission to Christ is the pattern for the wife’s submission to her husband. The husband as head of the wife gladly loves her and gives his life for her; the wife in turn gladly submits to and honors her husband.

²⁴ Komonchak, J. A., Collins, M., & Lane, D. A. (2000). *The New dictionary of theology* electronic ed., p. 951. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

Unconditional love and acceptance is an essential and often overlooked part of human sexuality. Thus, sexual union has a largely unrecognized spiritual component.²⁵

St. Paul explains that the sex act is so closely tied to the complete joining of husbands and wives that they should act for each other's benefit.²⁶ Couples should abstain from sexual relations only for short periods of time and only when both the husband and wife agree (1 Corinthians 7:1–5 NKJV). St. Paul says:

“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

To have sexual feelings for one's spouse or to enjoy sexual pleasure with one's spouse is in accordance with God's design. Sex within marriage should be consensual for the benefit of both spouses. To use one's spouse as an object of pleasure without concern for the welfare of the other person can be sinful.²⁷ When both spouses participate in sex together for their mutual benefit, the result is the glorious experience that God intended it to be.

This experience of sexuality is reflected in the beautiful picture presented in the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). Song of Solomon exults in the goodness of sexual relations when enjoyed as God intended, between one man and one woman. Proverbs 5:15-23 also describes the pleasure of marital sex. These passages can also be interpreted as an allegory of the relationship that should exist between Christ and his bride, which is the Church.²⁸ These passages of scripture show us that Christians should have more accurate things to say about sex and a more rightful enjoyment of sex than anyone. This is a part of our living and visible witness to the world—that God and God's ways are right and righteous and joy-filled. The enjoyment and the jealous protection of love are “flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD” (Song 8:6 NKJV).

It can be concluded that God's creation culminated in the presence of man and woman on earth—made in the image of God and called to fruitfulness and dominion.²⁹ God's plan for procreation was for Adam and Eve to multiply and fill the earth with people. As men and women united their bodies it was expected that they would develop a love for one another that would be strengthened by sexual intimacy. Sex solely for pleasure, without regard for producing babies

²⁵ Hunt, J. (2008). *Biblical Counseling Keys on Homosexuality: A Case of Mistaken Identity* pp. 47-48. Dallas, TX: Hope For The Heart.

²⁶ See Eph. 5:22–23 and Col. 3:18–19

²⁷ Frye, P. (2011). *101 Quick Questions with Catholic Answers: Sexuality* p. 6. San Diego, CA: Catholic Answers.

²⁸ Turaki, Y. (2012). *Marriage and Sexual Morality*. In J. I. Packer, W. Grudem, & A. Fernando (Eds.), *ESV Global Study Bible* (pp. 1897–1898). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

²⁹ Somers, G., & Christmyer, S. (2004). *Genesis, Part I: God and His Creation* p. 11. Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing.

and bonding, violates the purpose of marital intimacy.³⁰ God's divine purpose for sexuality, must be exclusive, unconditional, permanent, and open to life.

³⁰ Op. cit. Frye, p. 7