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## Accents & Issues

# Sexuality

Human sexuality pervades almost all of life including more than physical differences between male and female and the physical act of sexual relations. Sexuality is the expression of the entire person living out the symphony of human existence.

Because men and women were created for fellowship with God, they are not to function as isolated beings. God is not solitary but Trinity — a being-in-relation. God is best understood through the relationships of his various personages — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Created in God's image, humans are also social beings (Gen. 1:26-27). Because men and women are essentially like one another, they have the potential for close fellowship, but because they are unlike each other as well, there is an additional dynamic to consider — human sexuality.

Creation affirms sexual identity as being male or female: “a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24; also Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph. 5:31). This summarizes the biblical understanding of sexuality in marriage — a man and woman united into one flesh.

Understanding our sexuality is essential for establishing relationships and coping with God-given physical urges. Such insight enables us to both understand God's healthy purpose for sexuality and reject destructive messages coming from culture. Popular understandings of acceptable sexuality sometimes include a casual relationship expressed in sexual intercourse without regard for the whole person or the consequences beyond momentary enjoyment. Thus, respect for the other person is diminished, while selfish gratification is elevated.

Yet, the biological aspect is only one part of human sexuality. Because of being created in God's image (personality) and being created female and male (sexuality), the relational potential of humanity complements and enhances physical intimacy. Nevertheless, the recognition of male and female identity does not necessarily involve sexual intimacy. Single and celibate persons also have a sexual identity. Males and females are created not only for procreation but also for relationship. In creation, God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Interdependency of the man and woman enriches both.

Indeed, human sexuality transcends both nonmarried and married relationships. The relation of males and females helps individuals to experience the image of God, even if that relationship involves friendship rather than marriage. Love is more than sexual desire.

Yet, of course, the acceptance of one's male or female nature is also important in marriage, where there is mutual fulfillment as each assumes responsibility for the wholeness of the other. This mutual fulfillment is pictured in the physical sex act itself. Indeed, God's vision for marriage affirms sexual desire. Placed within marriage, where emotional bonding is occurring, sexual expression is freeing and fulfilling. Becoming one flesh suggests a physical union that cannot be retracted or denied.

Genesis 4:1 says, “Adam [knew] his wife Eve.” The word “know” implies a deep, inexpressible communication, an experience of mutual identity. It is becoming “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Marriage provides the right relationship, at the appropriate times, and with the right person for the physical sexual union to express the depth of intimacy appropriate for marriage.

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The oneness that results from the sexual experience gives reason for sexual abstinence before marriage. Sexual intercourse affects our whole being so that afterwards we cannot be the same as before, as if that intimate act had never occurred. Premarital sex should never be treated as insignificant.

Moreover, infidelity in marriage damages the personality of the marriage. Unity is broken along with the covenant to be responsible for each other's wholeness. Thus the attractive attributes of the other are lost because they are detached from the faithful commitment between people. Instead of viewing the spouse as the image of God and a lifelong partner, he or she is seen as a physical object or worse. Consequently, there is the temptation to break the marriage covenant and seek intimacy elsewhere. The results are dehumanizing for all persons involved and destroy the bonds of marriage.

God gives human sexuality for fulfillment, enjoyment, and procreation. To truly experience humanity in its fullness is to find what it means to be created in God's image — male and female. Therefore, Christians should celebrate their sexuality, recognizing their power to be wholesomely sexual in relationship with one other person.

