



Accents & Issues

Human Sexuality

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen. 1:27-28)

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matt. 19:3-6)

Shun fornication [porneian]! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:18-20)

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:27-28)

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven. (Matt. 22:30)

Human beings are the creations of a wise and loving creator and the handiwork of a master artist. More than that, we are masterpieces made in that artist’s own image. We reflect his image best in community with one another. Our creator loves us and fashioned us for beautiful purposes. This biblical proclamation is the starting point for a Christian understanding of human sexuality.

Sex is a good feature of our existence as bodily creatures.

Human beings are made in the image of God. Genesis specifically mentions that humanity, in its sexual differentiation into male and female, reflects God’s image. Our sexual differentiation is as undeniable as it is essential for human well-being and the continuance of the human family. Only the union of the two created sexes can create more human life. Scripture upholds the goodness and generative power of the sexual union as a picture of God’s own generative life. Moreover, God has tied the union of the two created sexes to the covenant of marriage, and Jesus reaffirmed that connection by quoting Genesis to his religious critics.

Today there are many debates about the meaning of the word “sex” and its relation to the concept of gender. All that is meant here by the word “sex” is the simple fact that human creatures are designed by God with one of two sets of bodily capacities which enable each human sex to play a unique role in the continuation of the human family. Without this basic biological difference, humanity could not continue.

Christians are meant to glorify God in their bodies, surrendering their sexual desires to him.

We live in a fallen world and are born with misaligned desires. The compass of our hearts ought to point us toward our creator, but instead we find sin at work in our minds and bodies, leading us away from him and the purposes for which he created us. This is true of every human person in every area of life. Sin, including sexual sin, is common to all people.

For this reason, all of us need God’s grace and all of us can rejoice that he offers it to us so freely. His grace not only wipes away the guilt of sin, but also transforms us and empowers us to live in his way. There are essentially

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two paths for sexual holiness laid out before Christ's disciples in scripture: the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman and the celibate life. Both paths are difficult and depend on God's grace, both involve the denial of sexual desires, both are blessed by God, both are designed by God to deepen the involvement of individuals in community, and both allow for a full, satisfying human life.

Christians glorify God in their bodies when, in a marriage covenant, they commit themselves to a member of the opposite sex. In so doing they deny every desire for sexual activity outside that marriage, and work to live in a one-flesh harmony with their spouse.

Christians also glorify God in their bodies when they live celibately, either for a time prior to marriage, or as a committed way of life. A biblical view of sex does not mean that marriage and sex are necessary for a full, complete, and satisfying life. Jesus, who was celibate for his entire life, is the ultimate example of human life at its best. The Apostle Paul not only was single and celibate but praised that path above marriage.

Sexual activity outside the marital union of the two sexes is identified by scripture as *porneia*. *Porneia* means any use of our sexuality for purposes outside God's design. All humans face temptation in this area, all are offered grace, and all are called to walk with Christ's help in holiness. Our bodies have become temples of the Holy Spirit because Jesus bought us at the price of his own life. Therefore, we are called to surrender our desires and glorify our savior with our bodies.

Sex is transcended in Christ and will be transformed in the resurrection.

The world both makes far too little and far too much of sex. On the one hand, sex is cheapened by hook-up culture, pornography, and a general reduction of sex to mere pleasure or entertainment. On the other hand, some elevate a person's sexual desires to a place at or near the core of their identity. For this reason, many people think that to deny one's sexual desires is harmful and ultimately impossible. In this context, which simultaneously manages to under and over value sex, God's creational intent for sex really does arrive as good news.

God's good news is that sex, as a feature of our bodily creaturehood, is a great good. Like all creaturely goods, we are meant to refer it back to the creator and to use it according to his purposes. Surrendering our sexuality either in the covenant of marriage or in celibacy leads to great blessings in this life.

The Bible also makes it clear, however, that sex is not the center of what it means to be human. The good news is that our true life, the root of who we are, is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). Our identity in Christ transcends and eternally outlasts this life. To be in Christ is already to live as a human who is defined more by one's union with Jesus than by the biological fact of one's sex.

It is important to note that Christ taught us that sex, at least as we know it now, is not a feature of the resurrected life. People in the world-to-come will neither marry nor be given in marriage. It is not that there will be less intimacy at the return of Christ, but rather infinitely more. This is because the real and eternal marriage – the marriage which is pictured and anticipated in the earthly union of man and woman – will have come between Christ and his bride at last (Eph. 5:31-32).

Christ's disciples value the sexual dimension of our current bodily existence. We seek to honor God in our sexuality by living according to his designs rather than our desires. We affirm that both marriage and celibacy are intended by God as paths to community. With gratitude we acknowledge God's grace which helps us to yield ourselves, including our sexuality, to Christ.

