

# **A Biblical View Of Sex**

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### **Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:**

It is hard to believe that in two weeks (June 2, 2000) will come to an end my teaching career that began 36 years ago at the Ethiopian Adventist College (April 1964). Truly I can say that it has been a most rewarding experience for me to help our young people to understand and experience more fully Biblical truths.

The past 26 years spent here at Andrews University, have been so intense that they went by very fast. Besides teaching, I have been involved in researching and writing 15 books, and presenting seminars across North America and overseas. Lately the pressure has become overwhelming. This explains why I look forward with great anticipation to see the end of this quarter, which will also be the end of my regular teaching in a classroom setting. I said "regular teachings" because I have already accepted to lecture in the coming months here at the Seminary and elsewhere.

I am thankful to God for the opportunity to take an early retirement at the age of 62, so that I can spend whatever additional years the Lord will grant me to pursue my first love of researching and sharing biblical truths through the printed and spoken word. By God's grace I plan to write several new books dealing with vital aspects of our faith.

The very next book is entitled POPULAR HERESIES. The aim of this book is to help people understand the origin, development, and impact today of unbiblical beliefs, which are popular in the Christian world today. Some of the heresies I plan to examine are: the immortality of the soul, Sunday sacredness, once saved always saved, the Rapture, speaking in unknown tongues, the infallibility of the Pope, Purgatory, eternal torment, intercession of the saints, the worship of Mary, theistic and materialistic evolution, etc. Please advise me on what you consider other important popular heresies that need to be examined. Your suggestions will be seriously considered. I feel that this book can be an important witnessing tool in helping people of different persuasions understand why some of their popular beliefs are unbiblical.

Besides researching and writing, I look forward to present my popular Sabbath, Advent, and Christian lifestyle seminars across North America and overseas. Now that I no longer need to be back for the Monday morning class, I will be able to extend my weekend seminars wherever is necessary. My calendar for this year is heavily booked, but I still do have three weekends left open. Feel free to contact me if there is an interest for a weekend rally in your area. I will do my best to accommodate you.

## THE RESPONSE TO THE NEW BOOK *THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC*

The response to the latest book *The Christian and Rock Music* has surpassed my fondest expectations. We have received thousands of messages and orders from all over the world, especially from our subscribers to this newsletter. Many have called us and emailed us messages, not only to order copies of the book, but also to share with us their concern over the increasing adoption of "beat" music in our churches.

One encouraging message came from Dr. Humberto M. Rasi, who currently serves as Director of the General Conference Education Department, and editor of *Dialogue*, a magazine published in several languages for our college and university students. Dr. Rasi wrote: "You have assembled a qualified group of authors, some of whom I know personally. I share the concerns that led you to publish this book. Congratulations! Let me suggest how we plan to call this book to the attention of *College and University Dialogue's* readers and give it international exposure around the world." The message continues with concrete proposals. I would like to thank Dr. Rasi for informing our college and university students worldwide about this timely book.

There are two other messages which I would like to share with you, with the permission of their writers. I have chosen these two messages because they illustrate the challenge that pastors and parents are facing today, in protecting their members and youth from the influence of rock music.

The first message is from Marcelo T. Sigue, who serves as pastor of a SDA church in Orlando, Florida. If you wish to express your appreciation for his message, his email address is <siguemars@hotmail.com> Pastor Sigue wrote:

"Dear Dr. Bacchiocchi:

I was awoken at 3:00 o' clock this morning and I was wondering why? .In the midst of my wondering somehow I opened my computer and behold I read the announcement you emailed me about the new book *The Christian and Rock Music*. Your announcement could not have come at a better time. Your book is my long-awaited help to our church music problem.

For several weeks I had been battling with several contemporary musicians who are very insistent in playing loud, rocky 'praise music' during our church services. Being part of the singing group I am caught in the middle, but I did dare to say 'no' to a rocky portion of an Easter Cantata that was to be sung during the Sabbath morning service. After our practice on Friday evening almost 50% of the group 'mowed me' and walked out. At that particular moment I saw the hands of God holding me. I knew He was beside me. The group members went home that evening in a quandary. Some members of the group were determined to sing the rocky portion of the music, but other members prayed that God would convince the group not to leave it out.

Early that Sabbath, I have witnessed God's providential overruling. A lady of the singing group who was not present at the rehearsal on Friday night, sensed that the flow of communication among the group was not normal. Soon she was made aware that everybody was trying to observe whether or not the group would sing the rocky part of the cantata. I should explain that this group consists of 31 members who are mostly were medical and business professionals.

Just few minutes before the group was to sing, the lady who missed the Friday evening rehearsal, spoke passionately to the group and said: "Why don't we obey the Pastor, rather than going against him. This is worship. I suggest that we leave out the questionable part of the song." Marvel of it all, the group unanimously said AMEN. After the group sang, there was a loud applause praising God for the inspiring musical message. Those who were pro-rock music came to me and apologized for their attitude.

Your book will help our church to understand more fully why rock music is inappropriate for church worship. I feel like praising God for providing us such a timely study at this critical time. Please mail me 10 copies of *The Christian and Rock Music* at the following address: Pastor Marcelo T. Sigue, 2209 Pembroke Drive, Orlando, Florida 32804.”

The second message I would like to share with you comes from Dr. David Mayor, a medical doctor who practices medicine in the Chicago area. He ordered 100 copies of the music book to offer to families of his congregation. If you wish to commend him and his wife for their commitment to the youth of our church, their email address is: <drmayor@vailsys.com> Dr. Mayor wrote:

“Dear Dr. Sam:

Thank you very much for the shipment of *The Christian and Rock Music* which we have received. I awoke to pray about this music problem and our youth after a patient called me at 2:10 am the other morning. I almost read your entire book. God has inspired you! I am giving copies of the book to everyone whom I think will read them in our church. So far, I have had many positive comments.

My wife and I are parents to three boys (ages 5,14,15). What a gift from God! We take seriously the challenge to help these young men to be ready for Jesus soon coming. Judy has worked with the younger Sabbath School divisions and I have worked with the Junior/Teen–Youth groups that our older boys have been involved with. Although my music choices in the past have not always been the best, the realization that the effect of music on our boys has eternal consequences, has made my choice of music now very important.

We do not listen to rock and roll in our home and our boys are becoming excellent musicians. I am greatly dismayed at some of our youth leaders who feel that rock music must be played at youth programs to ‘draw in’ our young people. Along with a number of parents who do not listen to rock music in their home, we do not want our church to be the place where our youth are tempted to listen to rock music.

Recently we have been greatly disturbed by the kind of rock music played at youth rallies sponsored by the Pathfinder Camporee, the Illinois Camp Meeting and other church events. We uphold our church but we disapprove of the way a few vocal youth leaders are tempting our youth with the kind of music that we would not choose for our Adventist homes. May our standard for music be based on what is acceptable to God, and not on what is popular in our society.

Thank you for your Biblical Study,

Sincerely,

David Mayor, M.D., M.P.H.

Messages such as these warm my heart. It is reassuring to know that there are pastors and parents who are prepared to meet the challenge of protecting their members and youth from the addictive influence of “Christian” rock—a music that in most cases is designed to stimulate people physically, rather than elevating them spiritually.

To make it possible for many families to benefit from this timely book, we are now offering the book by **the case of 26 copies for ONLY \$170.00, that is, \$6.50 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00.** The price includes the mailing expenses to all destinations in North America AND overseas. Thank you for informing your church about this special offer. Feel free to contact us by email at <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> or by phone at (616) 471-2915. We still offer until the end of May two copies of the book for only \$25.00, postage paid. This means that you only pay \$5.00 for the second copy. We guarantee to process your order on the same day we receive it.

## A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SEX

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**A PERSONAL NOTE:** This Bible Study is excerpted from chapter 3 of my book *The Marriage Covenant*, which has been favorably reviewed by many scholars. Feel free to call us for a copy of this timely book. This past week Dr. Laura Schlessinger a popular Radio Talk host, requested three of my books, including *The Marriage Covenant*. Several people have told me that over this past weekend she quoted from the book again. In fact you will find part of this essay at her website: <http://www.drlaura.com> Look for "Dr. Laura Collection."

During much of Christian history, sex has been condoned as a necessary evil for producing children. Before the sexual revolution of our times, calling a lady "sexy" would have been insulting. Nowadays many ladies would accept that adjective as a prized compliment. "The Victorian person," writes Rollo May, "sought to have love without falling into sex; the modern person seeks to have sex without falling into love."<sup>1</sup>

The attitude of society toward sex has truly swung from one extreme to another. From the Puritan view of sex as a necessary evil for *procreation*, we have come to the popular *Playboy* view of sex as a necessary thing for *recreation*. From the age of warning "Beware of sex," we have come to the age of shouting "Hurrah for sex." *Homo sapiens* has become *homo sexualis*, packed with sexual drives and techniques.

Both extremes are wrong and fail to fulfill God's intended function of sex. The past negative view of sex made married people feel guilty about their sexual relations; the present permissive view of sex turns people into robots, capable of engaging in much sex but with little meaning or even fun in it. In spite of the increasing number of books on the techniques of love-making, more and more people are telling marriage counselors: "We make much love, but it isn't much good. We find little meaning or even fun in it!"

This essay examines the Biblical view of sex. We shall consider various aspects of sex within and without marriage in the light of the Biblical teaching. The first part surveys the past attitudes toward sex, from ancient Israel to modern times. The second part examines the Biblical view of the nature and function of sex.

For the sake of brevity I have left out the discussion about the morality or immorality of contraception as well as the important question of whether or not there will be marital relationships in the world to come. Those who are interested in these questions, can freely access the whole chapter or order the book *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>

### PART I: PAST ATTITUDES TOWARD SEX

**Ancient Israel.** The Hebrew people understood and interpreted human sexuality as a positive gift from God. They were not affected by the later Greek dualism between spirit and matter which considered sexual intercourse and evil "fleshy" activity to be shunned if possible. Such thinking was foreign to the Hebrews who saw sex within marriage as beautiful and enjoyable. A wedding was a time of great celebration, partly because it marked the beginning of the sexual life of the couple.

The bridal pair retired to a nuptial tent or chamber at the end of the wedding festivities to make love together while lying on a clean, white sheet. Blood on the sheet indicated that the bride had been a virgin and provided evidence of the consummation of marriage (Deut 22:13-19). A newly betrothed man was even excused from participating in war in order to be able to enjoy his bride (Deut 20:7)!

This indicates that the ancient Hebrews had a healthy attitude toward sex. They saw it as a divine gift which gave pleasure to the persons involved while providing the means for the propagation of the race. The classic example of the exaltation of human sexuality

is found in the Song of Songs. This book has often been a source of embarrassment to Jews and Christians alike. Some interpreters, like Sebastian Castellio, have viewed the Song of Songs as an obscene description of human love which does not belong in the Biblical canon. Others, like Calvin, have defended the inclusion of the book in the canon by interpreting it as an allegory symbolizing the love of God for His people. The book, however, is not an allegory. It is a romantic celebration of human sexuality. According to some traditions, portions of the book were sung during wedding processions and wedding feasts.

When the Hebrews came to the land of Canaan, they were exposed to the evil and excesses of the fertility cults associated with the worship of Baal, which included sacred prostitution. To correct these evils, several regulations were given. There were strict prohibitions, for example, against revealing in public one's "private parts" (Gen 9:21; 2 Sam 6:20), incest (Lev 18:6-18; 20:11-12,14, 20; Deut 27:20,22), bestiality (Lev 18:23; 20:15-16), homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13), and various kinds of sexual "irregularities" (Ex 22:16; Lev 19:20,29; 15:24; 18:19; 20:18; Deut 25:11). Overall, however, the Jews had a healthy view of sex, although they saw it primarily in terms of its reproductive function.

**New Testament Times.** In New Testament times, we find the beginning of two extreme attitudes toward sex: licentiousness and celibacy. Some interpreted the freedom of the Gospel as freedom to engage freely in sexual relations outside marriage. Jude speaks of "ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness" (Jude 4). Peter warns against the enticement of false teachers who had "eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin" (2 Pet 2:14). The problem of sexual permissiveness and perversion had become so noticeable in the Corinthian church that Paul openly rebuked those who engaged in incestuous and adulterous sexual relations (1 Cor 5:1, 6:16-18).

Other Christians were influenced by Greek philosophical ideas which viewed anything related to the physical aspect of life as evil. Since the sexual act involves "fleshly" contact and pleasure, it was viewed as inherently evil. This thinking prevailed in the Greco-Roman world, and exercised considerable influence among some Christians. In Corinth, for example, there were some Christians who maintained that unmarried people should remain single and those who were married should refrain from sexual activity (1 Cor 7:1-5, 8-11, 25-28).

Paul responded to these "ascetic" believers by affirming that it was right and proper for married persons to engage in sexual activities: "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. . . . Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season . . . lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control" (1 Cor 7:3,5). Paul counsels unmarried and the widows to remain single (1 Cor 7:8, 25-26). His reason, however, is based not on theological but on practical considerations, namely, on the need to avoid the added burdens of a family during the end-time persecution which Paul believed would soon break out (1 Cor 7:26-31). Paul's counsel does not reflect a negative view of sexuality because his advice was predicated solely on practical considerations. This is indicated by his counsel, "It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. . . . if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin" (1 Cor 7:9, 28).

**Christian Church.** The negative view of sexuality, already present in embryonic form during apostolic times among some Christians, developed fully during the early church, shaping the sexual attitudes of Christians up to modern times. This view can be traced back to Greek philosophy, especially to Platonic thought, which saw man as having two parts: the soul, which is good, and the body, which is bad. Such dualistic thinking influenced Christianity through a movement known as Gnosticism. This heretical movement taught that all matter, including the human body, was evil. Only the spark of the divine in man (soul) is good and through special knowledge (gnosis) such a spark could be released from the human body and returned to the divine realm. Thus, salvation was perceived as the liberation of the soul from the prison-house of the body.

This dualistic teaching greatly influenced Christian thought through the centuries to the point that many Christians gradually abandoned the Biblical view of the resurrection of the body, replacing it with the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul. The fundamental error of this view, which an increasing number of scholars are rejecting as unbiblical, is its assumption that matter is evil and must be destroyed. Such a view is clearly discredited by those Biblical texts which teach that matter, including the human body, is the product of God's good creation (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The Psalmist declares: "For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works" (Psalm 139:13-14).

The adoption of the unbiblical Greek notion of the human body as intrinsically evil has led many Christians through the centuries into a warped attitude toward sex. Its effect still lingers, as many today are still uneasy about their marital sexual relations, viewing them as something tainted with sin.

**Augustine's Role.** The church father who has molded the negative Christian attitudes toward sex more than any other person is Augustine (354-430).<sup>2</sup> He regarded the sexual drives and excitement which cannot always be rationally controlled as the result of sin. He speculated that if sin had not come in, marital intercourse would be without the excitement of sexual desire. The male semen could be introduced into the womb of the wife without the heat of passion, in a natural way similar to the natural menstrual flow of blood emitted from the womb.

As a result of sin, the sexual act is now accompanied by powerful drives which Augustine called concupiscence, or lust. The satisfaction of lust through intercourse, was for him, a necessary evil to bring children into this world.

In effect, Augustine equated original sin with the sexual act and its lustful desires since the act is the channel through which he thought the guilt of Adam's first transgression is transmitted from parent to child. By making the sexual act the means whereby original sin is transmitted, Augustine made sex for pleasure a sinful activity. This view necessitated the administration of baptism immediately after birth to remove the stain of the original sin from the soul of the new born baby.

The major fallacy of this view is its reduction of original sin to a *biological factor* which can be transmitted like an infectious disease through sexual intercourse. In Scripture, however, sin is *volitional* and *not biological*. It is a willful transgression of a divine moral principle (1 John 3:4), and not a biological infection transmitted through sexual contact.

What can be transmitted is not the guilt of sin, as Augustine believed, but its punishment. Guilt is the personal transgression of a divine principle, which cannot be imputed upon a third party. The punishment of our wrong doings, however, can be passed on in terms of sickness and/or evil hereditary tendencies. Scripture tells us that God visits "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation" (Ex 34:7). In the case of Adam's sin, what has been passed on to mankind are the consequences of its punishment, which include evil inclinations and death. These consequences cannot be mechanically removed through infant baptism.

**Original Sin.** The notion of original sin is derived primarily from Romans 5:12 where Paul says that "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." In this statement the apostle simply affirms the fact that mankind shares in Adam's sin and death. He makes no attempt to explain how this happens. He makes no allusion to sexual procreation as the channel through which mankind has become partakers of Adam's sin and death. The context clearly indicates that Paul's concern is to affirm the fundamental truth that Adam's disobedience has made us sinners and Christ's obedience has made us righteous: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19).

The concept to which Paul alludes to establish the connection between the sin of Adam and that of mankind is not that of biological transmission of sin through sexual procreation, but that of corporate solidarity. As Achan's sin became the sin of his household because its members shared in a corporate solidarity with him (Josh 7:24), so Adam's sin has become the sin of mankind because its members share in a corporate solidarity with him. This Pauline argument provides no support to the Augustinian attempt to equate original sin with sexual excitement and intercourse.

Augustine's association of original sin with sex has been widely accepted throughout Christian history, conditioning the sexual attitudes not only of Roman Catholics but also of Christians in general. As Derrick Baily notes, "Augustine must bear no small measure of responsibility for the insinuation into our culture of the idea, still widely current, that Christianity regards sexuality as something peculiarly tainted with evil."<sup>3</sup>

Partly as a reaction to this negative view of sex as a necessary evil for the propagation of the human race, a completely different and pleasure oriented (hedonistic) view of sex has emerged. The sexual revolution of our time has glamorized sexual profligacy and prowess, ridiculing sexual chastity as a prudish superstition. The catastrophic consequences of the sexual revolution can be seen in the ever-increasing number of divorces, abortions, incidents of incest, sexual abuse of children, and the loss of the true meaning and function of sex. In the light of this painful reality, it is imperative for Christians to understand the Biblical meaning and function of sex.

## PART II: THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SEX

The book of Genesis is the logical starting point for our quest into the Biblical view of sex. The first statement relating to human sexuality is found in Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." It is noteworthy that while after every previous act of creation, Scripture says that God saw that "it was good" (Gen 1:12,18,21,25), after the creation of mankind as male and female, it says that God saw that "it was *very good*" (Gen 1:31). This initial divine appraisal of human sexuality as "*very good*" shows that Scripture sees the male/female sexual distinction as part of the goodness and perfection of God's original creation.

**Image of God.** It is important to note also that human sexual duality as male and female is related explicitly to God's own image. Theologians have long debated the possible nature of this relation. Since Scripture distinguishes human beings from other creatures, theologians have usually thought that the image of God in humanity refers to the rational, moral and spiritual faculties God has given to men and women. This is a valid interpretation since these faculties distinguish human maleness and femaleness from that of lower creatures.

There is, however, another possible way in which human maleness and femaleness reflects the image of God, namely in the capacity of a man and a woman to experience a oneness of fellowship similar to the one existing in the Trinity. The God of Biblical revelation is not a *solitary* single Being who lives in eternal *aloofness* but is a *fellowship* of Three Beings so intimately and mysteriously united that we worship them as one God. This mysterious oneness-in-relationship of the Trinity is reflected as a divine image in man, not as a single individual but as a sexual duality of maleness and femaleness, mysteriously united in marriage as "one flesh." The love uniting husband and wife points to the love that eternally unites the Three Beings of the Trinity. In this sense, it constitutes a reflection of the image of God in humanity.

**A "Unisex" God?** Some theologians interpret the image of God, not in terms of a similarity of oneness-in-fellowship, but in terms of a correspondence in sexual distinctions within each person of the Godhead. Paul Jewett articulates this view saying: "If we are to think of God as sexual, we have to think of the divine as both feminine and masculine *if this symbolization of God is to convey a personal wholeness*. God becomes he/she. Otherwise the attribution of personality to God would be skewed or out of balance. A

purely masculine God would be as intolerable as a purely masculine human, and the same could be said for the purely feminine.”<sup>4</sup>

The attempt to make God into a unisex Being consisting of both feminine and masculine characteristics, if not properly qualified, can lead to a disastrous misrepresentation of the God of biblical revelation. While it is true that God possesses not only masculine but also feminine qualities, since He compares His love, for example, to that of a woman's for her sucking child (Is 49:15), the fact remains that the possession of feminine qualities does not make God into a “he/she” androgynous Being. We recognize varying degrees of masculinity and femininity in every person, yet we do not regard a man who possesses unusual feminine gentleness as a he/she person.

The fact that the Bible sometimes presents God as our Father (Jer 31:9; Matt 23:9), while at other times compares God to a crying or compassionate mother (Is 42:14; 49:15), does not mean that God is an androgynous he/she Being. It is important to see the distinction between those statements which describe the *person of God* (God *is* our Father) and those which describe the *qualities of God* (God *is like* a crying or compassionate mother). The former identifies the person of God, the latter compares the compassion of God to that of a mother.

Today, both liberal and evangelical feminists are clamoring for a re-symbolization of the Godhead based on impersonal or unisex categories. This is seen as the first indispensable step to clearing the way for the elimination of sexual and functional role distinctions in the home and in the church. To achieve this, they advocate dropping the masculine names of God, adopting, instead, non-personal names such as “parent, Benefactor, Almighty” or androgynous names such as “Father-Mother” for God and “Son-Daughter” for Christ. The ultimate result of such efforts is not merely switching labels on the same product, but rather introducing new labels for an entirely different product. Biblical faith knows nothing of an androgynous Godhead, partly masculine and partly feminine. Any attempt to introduce a female counterpart in the person of God means to reject the God of Biblical revelation, accepting, instead, the one fabricated by feminist speculations.

In light of the foregoing considerations, we reject as unbiblical the attempts to interpret the image of God in human maleness and femaleness as indicative of sexual distinctions within the persons of the Godhead. God transcends human sexual distinctions, yet He has chosen to reveal Himself predominantly through male terms and imageries because the male role within the family and church best represents the role that He sustains toward the human family. The image of God in humanity must rather be seen, as discussed earlier, in the rational, moral and spiritual faculties God has given to men and women, as well as in the capacity of a man and a woman to experience a oneness of fellowship similar to the one existing within the Trinity.

**Becoming “One Flesh”.** The oneness of intimate fellowship between a man and a woman is expressed in Genesis 2:24 by the phrase “*one flesh*.” “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and *they become one flesh*.” The phrase “*one flesh*” refers to the total union of body, soul, and spirit between marital partners. This total union can be experienced especially through sexual intercourse when the act is the expression of genuine love, respect, and commitment. The physical or sexual meaning of the phrase “one flesh” is clearly found in 1 Corinthians 6:16 where Paul applies it to the sexual intercourse between a man and a harlot.

The phrase *becoming one flesh* sheds considerable light on God's estimate of sex within a marital relationship. It tells us that God sees sex as a means through which a husband and a wife can achieve a new unity. It is noteworthy that the “one flesh” imagery is never used to describe a child's relationship to his father and mother. A man must “leave” his father and mother to become “one flesh” with his wife. His relationship to his wife transcends the one to his parents because it consists of a new oneness consummated by the sexual union.

*Becoming one flesh* also implies that the purpose of the sexual act is not only *procreational*, that is, to produce children, but also *psychological*, that is, the emotional need to consummate a new oneness-relationship. Oneness implies the willingness to reveal one's most intimate physical, emotional and intellectual self to the other. As they come to know each other in the most intimate way, the couple experiences the meaning of becoming one flesh. Sexual intercourse does not automatically ensure this oneness intimacy. Rather it consummates the intimacy of perfect sharing which has already developed.

**Sex as "Knowing"**. Sexual relations within marriage enable a couple to come to know each other in a way which cannot be experienced in any other way. To participate in sexual intercourse means not only to uncover one's body but also one's inner being to another. This is why Scripture often describes sexual intercourse as "knowing," the same verb used in Hebrews to refer to knowing God. Genesis 4:1 says: "And Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived."<sup>5</sup>

Obviously Adam had come to know Eve before their sexual intercourse, but through the latter he came to know her more intimately than ever before. Dwight H. Small aptly remarks: "Self-disclosure through sexual intercourse invites self-disclosure at all levels of personal existence. This is an exclusive revelation unique to the couple. They know each other as they know no other person. This unique knowledge is tantamount to laying claim to another in genuine belonging . . . the nakedness and physical coupling is symbolic of the fact that nothing is hidden or withheld between them."<sup>6</sup>

The process which leads to sexual intercourse is one of growing knowledge. From the initial casual acquaintance to dating, courtship, marriage, and sexual intercourse, the couple grows in the knowledge of each other and this makes greater intimacy possible. Sexual intercourse represents the culmination of this growth in reciprocal knowledge and intimacy. As Elizabeth Achtemeier puts it: "We feel as if the most hidden inner depths of our beings are brought to the surface and revealed and offered to each other as the most intimate expression of our love."<sup>7</sup>

**Sex as Pleasure.** A revolution has taken place in Christian thinking about sex within the last hundred years. Until the beginning of our century, Christians generally believed that the primary function of sex was procreative, that is, to produce children. Other considerations, such as the unitive, relational and pleasurable aspects of sex were seen as secondary and usually tainted with sin. In the twentieth century the order has been reversed. Christians place the relational and pleasurable aspects of sex first and the conception of children last.

From a Biblical perspective, sexual activity is both unitive and procreative, or we might say, recreative and reproductive. God's command, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28), is a command to be sexual. When we obey it, we fulfill God's purpose by becoming one flesh and producing children. So sex in marriage is both unitive and procreative. "During the Middle Ages," writes David Phipps, "Christians stressed the procreative aspect of sex while neglecting and sometimes despising its unitive purpose. Today, we stress its unitive role, and may ignore the command to be fruitful and increase in number."<sup>8</sup>

As Christians we need to recover and maintain the Biblical balance between the relational and procreational functions of sex. Sexual intercourse is a relational act of perfect sharing that engenders a sense of oneness while offering the possibility of bringing a new life into this world. We need to recognize that sex is a divine gift that can be legitimately enjoyed within marriage. Like all other divine gifts, sex is to be partaken of with thankfulness and moderation.

**Sex as a Divine Gift.** It is noteworthy that the wise man Solomon mentions together bread, wine, clothing and marital love as the good gifts that God has approved for our enjoyment: "Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white; let not

oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your life which He has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun" (Eccl 9:7-9).

Sexual activity is generally more important to humans than it is to animals. It is significant that among the mammals, only the human female is capable of enjoying sexual orgasm as well as the male. It is recognized that this experience binds a woman to her partner emotionally as well as physically. The fact that both the human male and female can share together in the pleasure of sexual intercourse indicates that God intended marital sex to be enjoyed by both partners.

In the Song of Songs, the celebration of sexual love between the bride and bridegroom is expressed in suggestive romantic words: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards . . . There I will give you my love" (Song of Songs 7:10-12).

The same positive view of marital sex is found in the New Testament. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul urges husbands and wives to fulfill their marital duties together, because their bodies do not belong to themselves alone but to each other. Therefore they should not deprive each other of sex, except by mutual agreement for a time to devote themselves to prayer. Then they should come together again lest Satan tempt them through lack of self-control (1 Cor 7:2-5).

In Ephesians Paul speaks of the physical union of a man and a woman as a profound "mystery" reflecting Christ's love for His church. Therefore, we should not be uneasy about marital sex, because when we come together we are experiencing something of the mysterious redemptive love of Christ for the world.

The author of Hebrews admonishes that "Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure" (Heb 13:4 NIV). Here, marital sex is extolled as honorable, something not to be embarrassed about. But the same writer adds, "God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb 13:4 NIV).

Bible writers are unanimous in commending sex within marriage and in condemning all forms of sexual activity outside marriage. Paul warns the Corinthians, "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral . . . nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders . . . will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9,10 NIV). The book of Revelation places the "fornicators" among those whose "lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur" (Rev 21:8).

**Sex as Procreation.** In the Bible the function of sex, as noted earlier, is not only unitive but also procreative. It not only serves to engender a mysterious oneness of spirit, but it also offers the possibility of bringing children into this world. God's command "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28) expresses God's original intent for the purpose of sex. Through marital sex and the birth of children, God enables men and women to reflect His image by sharing in His creative activity. This means that sex in marriage without the intention of having children fails to fulfill a fundamental divine purpose for sex. The lengths to which some married couples will go in order to have children reveals the deep creative urge God has placed within us.

Of course, not all couples are able to have or are justified in having children. Old age, infertility, and genetic diseases are but some of the factors that make childbearing impossible or inadvisable. For the vast majority of couples, however, sex in marriage should include the desire to have children. As sex consummates the act of marriage, so children consummate the sexual act. This does not mean that every act of sexual union should result in conception, but rather that the desire for having children should be part of the overall intent of sexual relations.

Various contraceptive techniques make it possible today to separate sexual activity from childbearing. A growing number of couples choose to enjoy a lifetime of sexual activity

without desiring or planning for children. They are not simply concerned about delaying their arrival but in avoiding them altogether. Children are seen as a threat to their high standards of living associated with two incomes and two careers.

“We are not meant to separate sex from childbearing” writes David Phypers, “and those who do, totally and finally, purely for personal reasons, are surely falling short of God’s purpose for their lives. They run the risk that their marriage and sexual activity may become self-indulgent. They will only look inwards to their own self-satisfaction, rather than outwards to the creative experiences of bringing new life into the world and nurturing it to maturity.”<sup>9</sup>

The life-begetting function of sex enables a married couple to further God’s creative work by becoming procreators with Him. It is altogether consistent with God’s creative work that the sexual life-begetting experience should be joyous. Did not God’s angels shout for joy at His first creation (Job 38:7)? Bringing into life a new person in God’s image is a joyful and solemn privilege delegated by God to married couples. In this sense, they become workers together with God in furthering His creation.

**Importance of Children.** Children are a fundamental part of our marriage and sexual relationships. They represent God’s blessings upon the marital union. The Psalmist expresses this truth, saying: “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him. Like the arrows in the hands of a warrior are the sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them” (Ps 127:3-5 NIV).

The population explosion has not rescinded God’s command to be fruitful and multiply. World famine is not so much the result of too many people as much as the result of greed, exploitation, irresponsible governments, misuse of natural resources, and unwillingness to adopt more effective methods of agriculture and to teach people responsible family planning. While a number of developing countries are facing population explosions, most Western countries are experiencing population stagnation or decline. Western societies are aging, and unless the current trend is reversed, it will soon become increasingly difficult for them to support their ever-growing numbers of elderly people.

We no longer need large families, but we still need families. The church needs Christian families that can share with the world the love of God experienced in the home. Society needs the service and moral influence of Christian families. Most Western societies live today in what social analysts call the “Post-Christian era.” This is the era in which social values and practices are influenced no longer by Christian principles but rather by humanistic ideologies. The latter promote a secular view of marriage and a hedonistic view of sex. Marriage has become a dissolvable social contract rather than a permanent sacred covenant, and sex is regarded primarily as a recreational activity rather than as a procreational responsibility.

As Christians, we are called not to conform to the world (Rom 12:2) but to transform the world through God’s given principles and power. In the area of marriage and sex, we must show to the world that we obey God’s command to “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:22) and not to “put asunder what God has united” (Matt 19:6).

**Sex Outside Marriage.** Nowhere has Christian morality come under greater attack than in the whole area of sex outside marriage. The Biblical teaching that sex is *only* for marriage does not even enter the thinking of most people today. The Biblical condemnation of illicit sexual acts has become for many a license for sexual experimentation.

The popular acceptance of sexual permissiveness is evidenced by the introduction and use of “softer terms.” Fornication, for example, is referred to as “pre-marital sex” with the accent on the “pre” rather than on the “marital.” Adultery is now called “extra-marital sex,” implying an additional experience like some extra-professional activities. Homosexuality has gradually been softened from serious perversion through “deviation” to “gay

variation.” Pornographic literature and films are now available to “mature audiences” or “adults.”

More and more, Christians are giving in to the specious argument that “Love makes it right.” If a man and a woman are deeply and genuinely in love, they have the right to express their love through sexual union without marriage. Some contend that pre-marital sex releases people from their inhibitions and moral hangups, giving them a sense of emotional freedom. The truth of the matter is that pre-marital sex adds emotional pressure because it reduces sexual love to a purely physical level without the total commitment of two married people.

**Biblical Condemnation.** The Biblical condemnation of sexual relations before or outside marriage is abundantly clear. Adultery, or sexual intercourse between married women or married men and someone other than their marital partners, is condemned as a serious sin. Not only is adultery forbidden in both versions of the Decalogue (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18), but it was also punishable by death in ancient Israel: “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death” (Lev 20:10; cf. 18:20; Deut 22:22-24). The same punishment was meted out to a man or a woman who engaged in pre-marital sex (Deut 22:13-21, 23-27).

The New Testament goes beyond the Old Testament by internalizing the whole sexuality of a person and placing it within the context of motivation. Jesus emphasized that to entertain lustful desires toward a person of the opposite sex outside marriage means to be guilty of adultery (Matt 5:27-28). The reason for this is that defilement comes not only from outward acts but also from inward thoughts, which in Biblical symbology derive from the heart: “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man” (Matt 15:19-20).

Sexual laxness was pervasive in the Greco-Roman world of New Testament times. Hence, one of the conditions the Jerusalem council made for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Christian Church was that they should abstain from all forms of “unchastity” (Acts 15:20,29).

Paul’s letters reveal the difficulties the apostle had in leading Gentile converts away from sexual immorality. To the Thessalonians, he wrote: “For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity; that each of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God” (1 Thess 4:2-5). Here Paul admonishes those who had sexual urges to satisfy them by entering not into temporary relationships “in the passion of lust like the heathen who do not know God,” but into permanent marital relationships. Such relationships are to be characterized by “holiness and honor.”

Paul is most explicit in his condemnation of prostitution. He asks the Corinthians who lived in the celebrated sex center of the Mediterranean world: “Do you now know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two shall become one flesh.’ But he who is unified to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:16-20).

**Reasons for Condemnation.** In this passage, Paul helps us to see why the Bible strongly condemns sex outside marriage. Sex represents the most intimate of all interpersonal relationships, expressing a “one-flesh” unity of total commitment. Such a unity of commitment cannot be expressed or experienced in a casual sexual union with a prostitute where the concern is purely commercial and recreational. The only oneness experienced in such sexual unions is the oneness of sexual immorality.

Sexual immorality is serious because it affects the individual more deeply and permanently than any other sin. Paul describes it as a sin committed inside the body: "Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body" (1 Cor 6:18). It might be objected that all sins of sensuality such as gluttony or drunkenness affect a person inside the body. Yet they do not have the same permanent effect on the personality as the sin of fornication. Indulgence in eating or drinking can be overcome, stolen goods can be returned, lies can be retracted and replaced by the truth. But the sexual act, once committed with another person, cannot be undone. A radical change has taken place in the interpersonal relationship of the couple involved that can never be undone.

"The immoral man sins against his own body." This truth is openly rejected by those who regard pre-marital sex not as sinful, but as helpful to a satisfactory sexual adjustment in marriage. Some even believe that sexual relations with the person one intends to marry are necessary to guarantee sexual compatibility. Such attitudes fail to recognize that sexual intercourse before marriage is the worst possible preparation for marriage. The reasons for this are not difficult to discover.

**Sex without Commitment.** To begin with, sex before marriage is sex without commitment. If we do not like our partners, we can change and find somebody else. Such casual relationships destroy the integrity of the person by reducing it to an object to be used for personal gratification. Some, who feel hurt and used after sexual encounters, may withdraw altogether from sexual activity for fear of being used again or may decide to use their bodies selfishly, without regard to the feeling of others. Either way, our sexuality is distorted because it destroys the possibility of using it to relate genuinely and intimately toward the one we love.

Sex cannot be used as a means for fun with one partner at one time and as a way to express genuine love and commitment with another partner at another time. Those who become accustomed to a variety of sexual partners will find it difficult, if not impossible, to express through sex their total commitment and final intimacy to their marital partners.

Engaged couples will probably deny that when they sleep together they are not expressing genuine commitment to one another. But if they were fully and finally committed to each other, they would be married. Engagement is the preparation for marriage, but it is not marriage. Until the wedding vows are taken, the possibility of breaking up a relationship exists.

If a couple has had intercourse together, they have compromised their relationship. Any subsequent break up will leave permanent emotional scars. It is only when we are willing to become one, not only verbally but also legally by assuming responsibility for our partners, that we can seal our relationships through sexual intercourse. In this setting, sex fittingly expresses the ultimate commitment and the final intimacy.

Marriage licenses and wedding ceremonies are not mere formalities but serve to formalize the marriage commitment. As Elizabeth Achtemeier explains: "Just the fact that such young people [living together] are hesitant legally to seal their union is evidence that their commitment to one another is not total. Marriage licenses and ceremonies are not only legal formalities; they are also symbols of responsibility. They say publicly, what is affirmed privately, without reservation, that I am responsible for my mate—responsible not only in all those lovely emotional and spiritual areas of married life, but responsible also in the down-to-earth areas that have to do with grubby things like money, health insurance, and property. For example, two people just living together have no obligation for each other when the tax form comes up for an audit, or the other is involved in a car accident and legal suit; but persons holding a marriage license do have such responsibility, and commitment to a marriage involves accepting that public responsibility too. It is a matter of accepting the full obligations that society imposes on its adult members in order to ensure the common good."<sup>10</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Sex is seen in the Bible as part of God's good creation. Its function is both unitive and procreative. It serves to engender a mysterious oneness of body, mind, and spirit between husband and wife while offering them the possibility of bringing children into this world.

Scripture strongly condemns sex outside marriage because it is a sin affecting a person more deeply and permanently than other sins (1 Cor 6:18). It leaves a permanent mark in the consciousness that cannot be removed. Sex outside of marriage is sin because it is sex without commitment. It reduces a person to an object to be used for personal gratification. Such a selfish use of sex impairs, if not totally destroys, the possibility of using it to express and experience genuine love and commitment toward one's marital partner. At a time when sexual permissiveness and promiscuity prevails, it is imperative for Christians to reaffirm their commitment to the Biblical view of sex as a divine gift to be enjoyed only within marriage.

**A NOTE:** For the sake of brevity I have left out the next two sections dealing with the use of contraceptives and marriage in the world to come. You can access the whole chapter or order the book *The Marriage Covenant* at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>

## ENDNOTES

1. Rollo May, "Reflecting on the New Puritanism," in *Sex Thoughts for Contemporary Christians*, ed. Michael J. Taylor, S.J. (New York, 1972), p.171.
2. For a discussion of the attitude toward sex of the early church, including Augustine, see Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Common Sense About Sexual Ethics: A Christian View* (New York, 1962); Donald F. Winslow, "Sex and Anti-sex in the Early Church Fathers," in *Male and Female: Christian Approaches Sexuality*, eds. Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse and Urban T. Holmes III (New York, 1956).
3. As quoted by William E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married?* (New York, 1970), p.175.
4. Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids, 1975), p.261.
5. See also Genesis 4:17, 25.
6. Dwight H. Small, *Christian: Celebrate Your Sexuality* (Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1974), p. 186.
7. Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Committed Marriage* (Philadelphia, 1976), p. 162.
8. David Phypers, *Christian Marriage in Crisis* (Kent, England, 1986), p. 38.
9. Ibid., p. 39.
10. Elizabeth Achtemeier (n. 7), p. 40.

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