

Walking in Intimacy

[Genesis 1:26-28](#)

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[Real Audio \(3 MB\)](#)

According to the first chapter of the Bible, there is nothing more God-like about us than our created yearning for the opposite sex.

*** It has been six years since I have preached on sexuality. I was thinking that was too long. But as I labored over the preparation of the sermon this week, I started thinking it hadn't been long enough. This is a hard topic to speak about well. But it's a critically important part of our walk with God.

I am of the minority opinion that people are not as obsessed with sex as Hollywood and the media make us out to be. I find that people spend a lot more time worrying about their health, jobs, children, and even friendships than they do their sexuality. But maybe that's part of the problem. By not paying enough attention to this topic, and thinking it is just sex, we make some of our biggest mistakes in life. It's never just sex.

Recently a whole vocabulary of words has developed that are now attached to the word sex such as sexual drive, sexual tension, sexual repression, and sexual fulfillment. These new words leave us with the impression we are controlled by a sexual force. If you accept that idea, you are then propelled into the prevailing debates about sex. Some claim that sex is a controlling appetite like hunger or thirst that has to be met. Others claim that sex is dangerous and as my father used to say, "Just leave it alone."

The Bible says neither of these things about sexuality, because the Bible doesn't think it's a force that controls us. Rather it claims that sexuality is a mark of holiness that we control. In fact, the Bible claims that sexuality was created to be one of the holiest things about us.

In the first chapter of Genesis we are told, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." The image, or the likeness, of God upon our lives is that we are created as male and female. The woman is made in the image of God, and the man is made in the image of God, but they reflect this image in their relation to each other.

We were not made in the image of God as male or female, but as male and female. Men were created to be men in the presence of women. Women were created to be women in the presence of men. They are unsettled and confused by the differences in each other, but still drawn to each other as a created complement. Thus, all relationships between men and women are sexual. The sexuality is hopefully under control, but it is always there. And this is the important thing -- it is supposed to be always there.

In their created sexual relationship to each other, men and women reflect the image of God who, by his own nature, is relational. This means that our sexual yearning is actually a created means of yearning for God. That's why sexuality was meant to be one of the holiest marks of God on your life. You can profane this holy thing if you choose to, and the invitations to do just that are legion today. But the Bible wants you to know that from the beginning the purpose of your sexuality has been to pursue holiness. It doesn't matter how old you are, it doesn't matter if you're married or single, you are always a sexual being, and you are always yearning for the other. Behind it all is a created yearning for the Creator.

In his book *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis makes the claim that actually all of creation has this yearning for the other. Unlike English, most languages demonstrate this by giving all nouns a gender. Thus the mountain, which is usually a masculine noun, yearns for the trees, the rain, and the snow, which are feminine. House is usually a feminine noun; car, of course, is usually masculine. But remote control in French is a feminine noun! (Which is why men like to hold it so much.)

Lewis' point is that in giving humankind dominion over all of creation, and by making them alone in his image, God has given men and women the capacity to be the representatives of the masculinity and femininity of the world. Their sexual yearning for each other embodies the yearning of all creation. It also embodies the yearning of the Creator for his creation, and the yearning of Christ for his bride, the church.

All this is a yearning for physical and spiritual communion. God did not create you as a soul and then wrap a disposable body around you that's unimportant. According to Genesis chapter two, he created you as a body and then brought that body to life by breathing a soul into it. This means your body and soul are intricately related. Anything that we do to the body has implications for the soul, which is why it is never "just sex." And the soul expresses itself through the body's yearning. When Adam saw Eve for the first time he didn't say, "I bet she will make a wonderful partner for Bible Study." No, he said, "This at last is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh!" So the man and the woman came together, "naked and unashamed," because they were able to enjoy both spiritual and physical communion as soulmates. That's what sexuality is, according to the Bible: the melding of the physical and spiritual, the body and the soul.

This means that the sexual act of becoming one flesh is something of a sacrament. A sacrament is a visible sign of an eternal reality. In the Protestant Church we only observe two sacraments: Communion and Baptism. But there are other things that function like sacraments, or are what we call sacramental. Like intercourse, which is a sign and symbol of our yearning for intimacy with God.

That is why this holy act can never be reduced to talk about "doing it," which is such profane language for holiness. When you engage in sex, you are not just touching someone's body. You're touching their soul. This is why there is so much hurt and guilt tied up with sex. It's because we lost the holiness of the act and didn't realize people were putting their hands on our soul.

In every religious culture there is some sense of veiling holy things, because no culture uses holy things casually. You would be horrified to hear that someone had taken our communion cup and used it for a root beer float. That's because that chalice has been set apart for a holy purpose. Similarly in the Old Testament, the Hebrews hung a curtain around the altar in the Holy of Holies in their Temple. It was meant to protect the holy meeting place with God from being profaned. Well, according to the Apostle Paul your body is the temple of holiness, the meeting place with God. You have to control access to it, or the holiness will be profaned. And as the Bible cautions, the person who holds the holy casually is always burned.

This is why the Bible clearly teaches that sexual intercourse should only occur in marriage where you find the faithful priest who is committed to a vocation of being one flesh with you, not just sexually but in all life for the rest of your life. In the words of Karl Barth, "It must be God who is manifested in lovers." For holiness to be manifested in making love, there has to be a vow because God only loves us in covenants.

If you have sex with someone with whom you don't share a vow, take a hard look in the mirror in the morning and ask yourself why you feel so empty. It's because your soul has been robbed. Sexuality will not create intimacy for you. That would be like coming to the communion table, thinking if you take the bread and wine it will make you a Christian. No, you take the sacrament not to create reality but to express it. So the Bible calls people to engage in the sacramental act of intercourse not to find intimacy, but to express the intimacy that is known only by those who share a vow.

What does this say then to people who are not married? While sexuality is essential to your created nature, sexual activity is not. You can enjoy your sexual identity without wrapping your soul around another person. You can enjoy being a woman who enhances her femininity, or a man who loves being a guy, without having sex, because the sexual yearning was always for God anyway. And that is a yearning anyone can have fulfilled.

No one lived a better life than Jesus who was a man with the sexual yearnings of a man. But he did not marry or have children, and he remained chaste his whole life. Yet his life was fulfilled in knowing that his yearning was for God. Clearly, while sexuality is crucial to our identity, sexual activity is not necessary to a good life. In fact, if you allow someone to grab hold of your soul without commitment, it will inevitably lead to a painful life.

"What if you have already had sex without the vow?" I am often asked. "What about sexual failure?" For starters, we have all failed sexually. Jesus said everyone who has looked at another with lust has already committed adultery in the heart. Jesus' point is that if religious people think they're clean on the sex issue, they're missing the hard inner truth of their lives. We have all failed, because again, sex isn't just a matter of what you do. It's a matter of directing the yearning to God. Have all your sexual thoughts been holy, sacramental? Of course not. Many of us have gone way beyond unholy thoughts.

This is why Jesus pressed the point. It wasn't to judge us, but to call us to confess, repent and turn around, and accept forgiveness. When God forgives us, he frees us from the mistakes and sins of the past, and he creates "a new and right spirit" within us. This is what the ministry of Jesus was about: to find us, forgive us, and restore the divine image that had been corrupted in our lives. So the things we have profaned can be made holy again by the grace of God in Christ.

I have a friend who has turned from his sexual failures of the past and turned to the Savior who can restore the holy image of God in our lives. Now he even calls himself a "Born Again Virgin." Of course no one can become a virgin again. But I still like that phrase because it demonstrates that new creation is always possible.

Jesus can even heal the hurt that always comes from being burnt by handling holy things casually. He can heal the hurts of what others have done to you, what you have done to others, and what you have done to yourself. Jesus can heal it all because that is a Savior's business. He longs to do that for you. All you have to do is ask and the God-like image of holiness can be restored.

Lift our eyes, O Creator, to see that all of our yearnings are for you, who can make all things new. Amen.