

CONVERSATIONS

Social Awareness, Living Truth

Series 2, Paper 4

HUMAN SEXUALITY: UNDERSTANDING HOLY SEXUALITY

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Sex is everywhere. It is used to sell everything from cars, to cleaning products to cheap vacations. It's incorporated into almost every digital media platform. It screams loudly from the cover of magazines as we stand in line to buy our milk and bananas. These messages communicate that sex is something everyone is doing, or at least needs to be doing, in order to be popular, happy, successful and even healthy. It seems sex and sexuality have become predominate aspects of an individual's identity. In our culture, sex has been reduced to an animal-like instinct, but has been given a god-like quality.

As a result, have Christ-followers adopted a cultural view of sex, which has diminished its importance and elevated its practice? Is it possible that we are now viewing sexuality through cultural lenses that have shaped our perspective of sex's intended design? Was sex designed? What is sexuality? Let's explore all of this together.



WHY THIS MATTERS - CULTURAL SEXUALITY

Healthy sexual expression in a marriage relationship promotes emotional intimacy and wider commitments to family and community. Much of that unified vision has been dismantled in our modern culture, creating a fragmented view and practice of sex and sexuality. This has a profound impact on us today and has significant implications for how we live as disciples of Christ. Let's look at a few shifts in our culture's view of sexuality.

1. Sex & Children

Having sex was always connected to the potential of having children. In previous generations, people would be careful about who they had sex with, as it could bind them to another person for life. This meant there were natural boundaries and strong considerations around a person's choice of sexual activity. This consideration would change drastically in the mid 60's to early 70's as contraception and abortion became legal, widespread and normative. People could now experience sex, without thinking of any further consequence or repercussion beyond the immediate experience of sex with their sexual partner.

Cultural Shift 1: The purpose of sex moves away from pleasure and procreation with a spouse; commitment to family with children is optional.

2. Sex & Marriage

In this cultural shift, sex no longer carried consequences of children and investment in a relationship with a sexual partner lost significance. The message from culture was that sex was primarily about two people coming together for mutual enjoyment. Media began to portray sex as simply an expression of intimacy between two people, whether married or unmarried.

Cultural Shift 2: Sex is about pleasure with one another; marriage is optional.

3. Sex & Real Intimacy

During the sexual revolution of the 1960's, the focus of sex shifted from a mutually enjoyable and satisfying activity to one of personal experience. Our personal right to sexual expression, unconstrained by others' rules or opinions, including the Church and Scripture, was elevated. Pornography focused on our paramount need for sex and our unquenchable desire for sex that is a fulfilling personal physical experience, all which trumps commitment.

Cultural Shift 3: Sex is about personal pleasure; commitment is optional.

4. Sex & People

Further disintegration has taken place with the mainstream access to online pornography and the explosion of sexual content online. Now, there is the consumption of sexual acts, feeding desires, achieving orgasm, all without another human person. The focus of experience is now on the individual person and how they find satisfaction. A real, live partner is no longer necessary. Sex is often best when it's experienced by yourself. A famous Woody Allen quote says, "Don't knock masturbation. It's sex with someone I love."

Cultural Shift 4: Sex is about my personal fantasy, desires and physical experience; other people are optional.

For many in society, sex now has become an isolated want, need, desire, and experience that is totally disconnected from family, marriage, commitment, and God's great design. Even if we continue to believe in and practice a biblical view of sexuality that upholds sexual expression between a man and a woman within the covenant of a marriage, other cultural messages are continually bombarding us. Without deep reflection, we may not recognize the shift that has occurred in our thinking and our view of sex and sexuality.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH? HOLY DESIGN

God's design for sex is revealed in Scripture, "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27 NLT)." The writer of Genesis further explained, "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh (Genesis 2:24 NIV)." God intentionally created us as males and females with sexual hormones and drives, leading to sexual expression within the covenant of marriage. His design for sexuality is written both on our anatomy and in His Word. As the Creator of our sexuality, God establishes the purpose and parameters within that design. However, our culture often chooses to define sexuality within the parameters of human freedom and personal choice.

Human sexuality was meant to be expressed within a covenant relationship. Firstly, God's covenant of love to us His children is one of provision and protection. He has given us the incredible gift of sex by which we can experience pleasure, intimacy, and the blessings of procreation. God provides protection for this powerful gift by giving it purpose within the covenant relationship of marriage between a man and a woman, much like the protection that a fireplace gives to fire.

While our hyper-sexualized culture tries to diminish any potential harm that comes with sexual expression outside of marriage, we are now beginning to understand the harmful effects of sex outside of this protection. While our sexuality is physical, it is also spiritual, and it stems from our deep longing for connectedness with God and others. From this vantage point, it is clear to see why sex expressed through a digital or causal connection cannot act as a meaningful substitute for what was intended for us to enjoy. What is needed is a reorienting of our true desires for love towards God and others.

We were not created to find our ultimate fulfillment or identity through sex or our sexuality. Only surrendering to God's love will satisfy our longings and reorient our desires. C.S. Lewis describes us as "half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Sexuality that brings together the spiritual and the physical reveals the power, transcendence and potential that is embedded in God's design. The intimate bonding between two lovers can be measured through the release of the bonding hormone, oxytocin, and through the depth of connection that this union creates. The physical pleasure of sexual stimulation is part of God's design. The Song of Songs is a lover's poem about the delight and pleasure both the husband and wife experience, and that they receive God's blessing, as they experience intimacy together under His delighted eye. Sexual pleasure within the covenant of marriage was God's idea. The joy and connectedness that sexual union provides was also designed to take us beyond ourselves as it has the potential for creation of something beyond ourselves. The conception of another human being the fruit of the union between

husband and wife has always been an integral part of God's design. Intimacy, pleasure and procreation are the multi-chord strand that ties lovers to each other and to God.

HOW ARE WE TO RESPOND? REGAINING PARADISE LOST

Adam and Eve, in the Garden, basked in God's deep love for them and were able to love each other perfectly. That's what each of us was created to experience. Sin has warped and disintegrated God's design for sexuality into a holey affair, full of pitfalls, hurts, and disappointments even within marriage. God offers us a reforming of our desires and sexual practise to its rightful significance through living a life of holiness provided to us through Christ Jesus.

The practice of holy sexuality allows for God to reorient our sexual desires and expression to reflect His design in singleness and in marriage. This lifestyle choice is lived out in community. There is constant temptation to pull away from others and attempt to navigate our journeys alone. Our churches and families need to become safe places for us to learn about God's design for sexuality, as well as to bring our questions and our struggles.

The practice of holy sexuality allows us to see with fresh eyes that it was

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from God's Holiness that our sexuality was designed. Even our best attempts at living a life of purity fall woefully short of God's Holiness.

It isn't just our acting out in ways that are contrary to God's design and purpose; even our lustful thoughts are enough to destroy any sense of self-righteousness. Christ, who has called us to live a life of purity in thought and action, has given Himself as the full means to living a life of holy sexuality. Scripture assures us that, "God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him (Philippians 2:13 NLT)."

Our sexuality was created for so much more than a one-night stand, an evening alone in front of the computer, a revolving door of monogamous relationships or reduced to a list of don'ts and condemnations. Our sexuality, as designed by God, is vibrant, passionate, holy and good. It's the fire in the fireplace.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Grant, J. (2015). *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books

<https://tolovehonorandvacuum.com/>



**Evangelical Missionary
Church of Canada**
Following Jesus Together

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Conversations is a publication of
EMCC's SALT Commission
(Social Awareness, Living Truth)